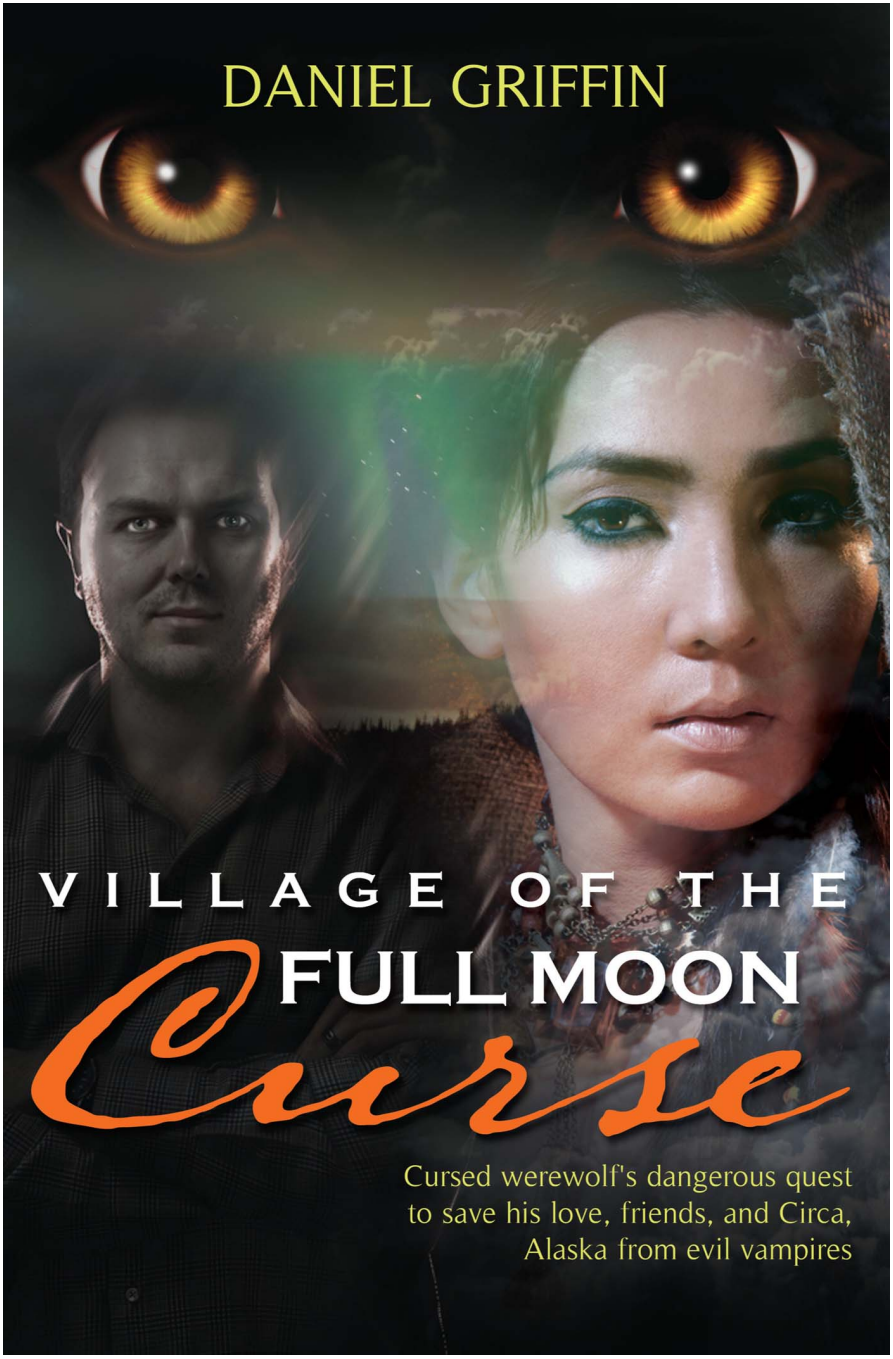
DANIEL GRIFFIN
VILLAGE OF THE
FULL MOON
Curse
Cursed werewolf's dangerous quest
to save his love, friends, and Circa,
Alaska from evil vampires

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Village of the Full Moon Curse

Cursed werewolf's dangerous quest to save his love, friends, and Circa, Alaska from evil vampires

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INTRODUCTION

Two friends, Brian Griffith and Carl Grogan, from Fairville, Alaska, traveled 200 miles up the Reese Highway in February, toward the remote Athabascan village of Circa, on a three-day hunting trip for caribou. Expecting forecasted clear skies and safe traveling weather, they instead found themselves stranded on the other side of Hawk Summit, in Circa, due to a blizzard, whiteout conditions, and a rare avalanche on the 3,800-foot summit. Unable to return or leave Circa until D.O.T. maintenance road crews cleared the summit, they soon realized something was amiss there, and learned of a horrifying six-month-old, secret werewolf curse that was putting everyone's life in extreme danger. While trapped in the village during a full moon, and concerned for their survival, they must also save a beautiful young girl from the village named Phyllis from an evil stranger, who also happened to be a powerful, centuries-aged vampire who also wanted to force Phyllis into an eternal life of servitude as his minion and mate, and would kill anyone who tried to stop him from turning her into a vampire. Could Brian and Carl stop both the werewolf and the vampire, sparing the village from death and destruction, or would this be the end for them all?

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PROLOGUE

August 15, 2010, 1:00 PM, Near Circa

Buck Holmberg excitedly displayed his huge smile as his cousin, Ron Holmberg, stared at him and his recently shot caribou bull through his Nikon camera lens, snapping one photo after another.

"Nice bull!" exclaimed Ron with excitement as Buck proudly held the caribou's head up by its antlers, with Buck's face glowing like a light, and both of them admiring the first caribou taken for their village on the first day of the caribou hunting season. "His meat will help feed our village through the long winter coming soon."

"Yes, indeed it will," replied Buck. "Good thing that I'm such a good and clutch, dead-eye shot, if I have to say so myself! had to be standing at least 400 yards away when I nailed him from that willow thicket, which you can barely see with the naked eye." He chuckled as Ron stared in the direction of his pointed finger.

Ron shook his head in disbelief, not knowing whether to be amazed by such a long and tough shot or pace off the yardage himself, hoping to decrease the estimated distance in some sort of way. He figured that he would be hearing the story of Buck's difficult shot, over and over again, all winter long. "I'll take my four-wheeler back to the village and get the Ford truck instead," he told Buck. "We can load him into the bed of the pickup, and then take him back to the village. That would be much better than dragging him six miles on the ground with the four-wheeler, and risk damaging the meat."

"That sounds like a great idea to me. I'll stay here and start the dirty work of cleaning and preparing him for the meat cutter, while you go for a joy ride," Buck replied sarcastically. They both paused for a moment, and then broke out into a light chuckle.

"See you in an hour!" yelled Ron as he speedily drove his four-wheeler away down the old dog musher's trail, quickly disappearing out of sight.

Buck and Ron were avid hunting and fishing buddies since they both were in the eighth grade together. Although related, they still considered themselves the best of friends. It would be a rare occurrence for them to go hunting or fishing without each other. Although, during the past year, Buck had been spending much more time courting a beautiful young lady from their Athabascan village, named Phyllis Duso, and less time fishing with Ron, who, at times, had found himself fishing or hunting alone or with someone else, while Buck was spending time with Phyllis.

Buck, a twenty-one-year-old, tall, lean, and muscular Athabascan Indian man, was the most energetic and best athlete from his Native village of Circa. At 6'2" and 215 pounds, and unrivaled strength, he often dominated and won every event he entered in at the yearly Eskimo-Indian Olympics. It's known as a four-day

cultural celebration between Eskimos and Athabascan Indians throughout Alaska and Canada, highlighting native culture and games. Many native girls in the competition claimed “love at first sight” when they lay their eyes on the handsome Buck and watched him compete in various competitions. With shoulder-length black hair, dark eyes, a flawless smile and physique, along with a confident and cocky personality, he undoubtedly could compel any girl he wanted to, for a date or romantic dinner, if need be. But Buck’s heart was for Phyllis only, and he would never do anything to hurt her or their relationship, for he loved her very much.

Ron, on the other hand, was the complete opposite of Buck in many ways. While Buck would prefer to fish and hunt the old-fashioned way, by hiking into remote places or walking to their favorite spots, Ron would prefer to drive a vehicle or a four-wheeler ATV to get there. Roadside hunting might be the best description for his hunting tactics. “Drive down remote trails and hope a moose or caribou happens to be nearby, or leap out in front of me for ‘an easy meal,’” Ron would often say. At 5’10” and 220 pounds, heavier and shorter than Buck, he was not close to the athletic specimen that Buck was, nor had he ever entered the Eskimo-Indian Olympics. “I don’t have time for fun and games” he said every year when the Olympics came. “I’d rather hunt, fish, or work on vehicles,” he would claim, while others might consider his response to the Olympics as more of a cop out for not wanting to embarrass himself.

Ron was the designated mechanic by the village, as his knowledge of various engines and equipment, like snowmobiles, four-wheelers, airplanes, and trucks, along with his passion for mechanics and outstanding skills at repairing almost anything automotive, made him very important and valuable to the village. He was even been known to have put lawn mower motors on bicycles for the village kids to play with.

Ron’s black hair was also much shorter and thicker than Buck’s hair. He once told Buck that he hated long hair, and figured it would be far more of a nuisance for him to have it and would only hinder him while hunting, fishing, or working. “Long hair gets in your eyes, makes your head sweat more, and could possibly get my head tangled in branches, like what happened to Absalom, King David’s son, of the Old Testament.”

Buck laughed loudly at Ron’s past statement, and the thought in his mind of his cousin Ron, hanging by his hair from tree branches, like Absalom.

Buck stood over the caribou’s carcass, slowly reaching for his hunting knife hidden within its sheath, ready to begin the unenviable job of field dressing or removing the bull’s stomach and intestines, which would help preserve its meat, and prepare it for the trip back to the village, and to the local village meat cutter. *The fun part of my hunt is over,* he thought. *Now begins the hard work.* He paused momentarily, distracted by the sound of honking geese and singing sandhill cranes, flying high above him in the clear, blue sky.

He also took a moment to glance at the many beautiful mountains on the horizon, which were reaching up toward the heavens, towering over the black spruce forest below at their base, mixed together with willow thickets that displayed their golden, yellow-colored leaves. With the warmth of the afternoon sun that he could feel on his neck and face, along with the fresh, crisp, early autumn air flowing through his nostrils, Buck felt overwhelmed with emotion and

gratefulness, and in awe of the beauty of his surroundings. Early autumn was his favorite time of the year, as it always seemed to rejuvenate, making him feel alive! Mid-August through early September in Alaska, with its cool, too-mild temperatures, meant that he could fully enjoy the beautiful, outdoor scenery without the brutal, onslaught attacks from vicious swarms of bloodthirsty mosquitoes, along with sufficient-enough daylight, between twelve and fifteen hours, which only began to rapidly decline after mid-September. At that present moment in time, there would be no other place on Earth that he would have rather been.

No sooner had his thoughts slowly switched from the magnificent scenery surrounding all around him, to the work on his caribou bull that he was ready to begin, when a branch from a black spruce tree in the forest behind him snapped loudly, followed by the sound of something walking. CRACK! Thud, thud! The noise quickly seized Buck's attention as he quickly turned his head to look in the direction of the sound, but saw nothing. The trees were too thick and he estimated the loud noise to be approximately thirty yards away, and possibly moving in his direction. CRUNCH! Thud, thud! He listened intently as several nearby squirrels began to chatter throughout the forest, as if they were sounding out warning alarms to whatever would hear.

Grizzly bear? Buck wondered to himself Grizzly bears have been known to move in to investigate after hearing a gunshot, as if it were a dinner bell, calling them to an easy meal. And the smell of his dead caribou carcass, along with its blood, had to be fumigating the air. But he hadn't seen any sign of bears in the area for the past two months, especially any fresh bear tracks.

He still didn't want to bet his life on the noise not being from a bear, or take an unnecessary risk by ignoring the sound. He slowly and quietly began looking for his rifle, a Remington BDL 30/06 bolt action, with a 3x9 telescopic scope, which was his first and still most cherished rifle, which was given to him for his fifteenth birthday by his now deceased parents, who both drowned two years later when their canoe capsized while fishing in the Yukon River. He had several notches carved into the stock, representing the many caribou and moose he had shot with it since then, and felt it was accurate enough to drill tacks with—and was also a sentimental reminder of his parents every time he used the rifle. He quickly spotted his gun, leaning against a black spruce tree, approximately five yards away, where he had leaned the rifle against when Ron was taking pictures of him and his caribou. Five yards wasn't considered a far distance by most sensible people, especially Buck; around the same distance as when traveling a round trip from the sofa to the refrigerator and back again in the average house or apartment. But when an unseen possible threat or predator could be lurking nearby in the trees, maybe even stalking him, his rifle seemed to him as if it were fifty miles away.

He began to question himself, wondering if whatever made the noise and walking sounds was anything to be concerned about at all, hoping that he would soon be laughing at himself with the emergence of a cow moose, another caribou, or some other harmless animal. SNAP! Another branch cracked, followed by the sound of low-pitched growls. Buck was not a person who became easily spooked or rattled, but his body started to feel overcome with nervousness, as worrying

thoughts raced through his mind when trying to remember if a bullet was already in his gun's chamber, or if it, instead, would need to be jacked in from the gun's clip. If he arrived at his rifle at the exact same time a grizzly bear emerged and charged, chambering a round would take up valuable seconds of time.

He hoped and prayed that he would have plenty of time to inspect the rifle's chamber and take steady aim with the rifle, toward and before whatever made the growling sound appeared, if anything were to appear at all. Four yards, three yards, two yards from his rifle, now one yard; Buck held his breath as he reached out and wrapped his large right hand around the wooden stock of his Remington, breathing a sigh of relief as he began to raise it up and away from the spruce tree. WHAM! He instantly felt the pain and shock that a quarterback might feel when being a victim of a blindsided, crushing sack from a blitzing free safety or linebacker. THUD! He hit the ground hard, landing onto his right shoulder and side, as something extremely fast, quick, and powerful barreled into him from his left side! Shock and confusion instantly overwhelmed the now dazed and semiconscious Buck, as he saw nothing before the attack on him, but only caught just a glimpse of a grey-colored, lightning-fast blur from the corner of his left eye. He now felt the weight of a semi-heavy, warm-blooded animal on top of his lower body, along with new horrible feelings of terrible pain in his left thigh, when what he perceived to be the sharp fangs of an animal clamped down hard, penetrating and tearing into his blue jeans and skin! He felt his own warm blood begin to trickle down his left leg, and the damp coldness of the ground against his right side, and then against his back and buttocks also, when he rolled to lay flat on his backside, hoping to catch a glimpse of what creature had just hit and flattened him.

The startled Buck slowly came to his senses as his leg began to throb with pain, equal to, or even possibly exceeding, the kidney stone he had passed three months earlier. He could now see his attacker as his blurred vision and eyesight began to clear, the animal moving upward and straddling his horizontal body while he lay motionless on the ground, much like the way he stood over his motionless, dead caribou just a few minutes earlier. He felt the dripping drool from its mouth on his face, and the smell of its foul stench of a breath made him want to vomit. Grrrrrrrrrrrrrrrr, its low-pitched growls sounded, like a death warning, being sent from the beast to him, and was about to be delivered! It wasn't a bear at all, like Buck had assumed, but instead, an animal that he would never have even considered or imagined possible. A very large grey wolf!

Its fangs were now just inches away from his face and throat, as it had lost interest in his left thigh and appeared to be preparing to deliver the coup de grace, ending Buck's pain and life permanently. It's piercing, fixed, brown eyes looked hollow and seemed to penetrate deep through to his soul as he lay motionless, and dared not to move. He hoped that by playing possum, the wolf would lose interest in possibly killing him and either move on to the caribou or leave. A million thoughts and anxieties raced through his mind at once. One wrong or sudden move and the wolf might react by ripping his face half off, or rip his throat out in seconds. But the wolf seemed only to be interested in him, determined to finish the job and kill him; not interested in feeding on the dead caribou at all. *Odd behavior for a wolf,* Buck thought. It was rare for wolves to attack humans, especially lone

wolves, and he wondered if this one was stricken with rabies or some other type of canine disease. Then like a loudspeaker going off in his head, a thought came to him: *My hunting knife!*

He had to devise a plan of attack in his mind as quickly as possible—on the best method of dispatching the wolf once he had the knife in his hand. He decided that his best option would be to grab the wolf by the hair on its throat with his hand, extend his arm, as too push the wolf's jaws away from his face, while at the same time, in one quick motion, thrust the knife into its heart and lung area with his right hand, followed by a quick roll and lunge toward his rifle, hoping to fire a shot into the wolf and kill it before it recovered. His rifle was now lying on the ground, close to him, after dropping it when the wolf blindsided him. Buck slowly inched his right hand down toward the sheath that was attached to his belt and waist, and held his knife. The wolf now pressed its cold nose against his throat, and its growls became noticeably louder. Its hair was standing straight up on its back. Buck knew he had to act quickly, and stop his time of procrastinating and delaying his necessary move, so to save himself from his unenviable situation for time was up. In what seemed like an eternity, he finally felt the knife's handle with his fingers and wrapped his big right hand around it, gripping it as tight as he could.

And then, miraculously and amazingly, the wolf that was straddling him, and seconds away from ripping his throat out, fell over on its side and became motionless. It was dead! Buck was in near disbelief, for his knife never left his sheath.

"Are you all right?" asked a familiar voice with great alarm. It was Ron, standing barely twenty yards away with his.308 caliber rifle, aiming its iron sights in the direction of the dead wolf.

Buck was so full of adrenaline and near shock that he never heard the fired shot and muzzle blast from Ron's rifle, nor the approaching four-wheeler.

"I'm glad that I came back to look for my satellite phone, to see if I had forgotten it here. And good thing for you that I'm such a great shot, too! A little too high, and my shot misses the wolf; a little too low, and my shot hits you instead!" said Ron with a nervous chuckle. He always preferred to attempt a little dry humor when trying to settle his nerves or worries.

"I had the wolf right where I wanted him," replied Buck jokingly, forcing out a slight chuckle, his body visibly shaking from the adrenaline rush and the pain he felt due to the attack. But also, he began feeling comforted by the presence of his cousin and best friend. "He got me really good, though. Bit me hard in my left thigh, and it hurts like hell!"

"I better get you back to the clinic ASAP! That bite wound on your thigh looks nasty, and you're bleeding. You could get a bad infection if the wound isn't cleaned up soon. I'll return back here with the truck and load up your caribou, after I drop you off there. I should load the wolf at the same time, too, so it can be taken to the clinic and tested to see if it were sick, since this is highly unusual behavior for a wolf. It didn't even seem to flinch or care when I approached, like it had rabies or something! I'll finish field dressing your caribou before I load him in the truck, and then take him to the meat cutter, and check up on you later," said Ron.

“I owe you dinner sometime, Ron. Sure glad and thankful that you came back when you did.”

“Don’t give it a second thought, my friend. We’re family, we’re blood!”

Buck threw his left arm around Ron’s shoulders, and he hopped one legged to the four-wheeler while Ron steadied him. They both quickly climbed on and sped off down the old dog musher’s trail, toward the clinic in Circa. Buck’s leg was throbbing with pain, and he was feeling extreme discomfort from every bump driven over on the trail.

8:00 PM

Later that evening, Ron drove his truck to the village clinic, parking near the front door, worried and anxious to hear the doctor’s test results on the dead wolf, as to whether or not rabies was the reason for its odd behavior. Suddenly, from the corner of his right eye, he spotted two people walking toward the clinic. One was a tall, long-haired, muscular man, holding a cane in his left hand and walking with a limp, and dressed in blue jeans, a thick, black T-shirt, which helped to display his large biceps, and brown hiking boots. The other was a beautiful young Athabascan Indian woman, wearing tight-fitting black jeans, white, high-heeled cowboy boots, and a blue jean jacket, who was clutching onto his right arm and her head resting on his rugged right shoulder as they moved slowly toward the clinic door. It was Buck and his gorgeous girlfriend whom he had been spending so much time with, Phyllis Duso. Ron hadn’t heard from Buck yet since he dropped him off at the clinic earlier in the afternoon.

“Shouldn’t you be home resting your leg?” asked Ron with a chuckle.

“I’m doing really well right now, dad,” replied Buck with a touch of sarcasm, humor, and wit. “The doctor gave me some Vicodin for my pain, and antibiotics in case of infection. And I also have to know myself what the deal with that wolf was.”

Phyllis smiled at Ron. “I tried to persuade him to stay home also,” she said, “but he’s just a tad bit stubborn.”

Her friendly smile melted Ron’s heart, making his legs and knees feel weak. Phyllis was, without a doubt, the most naturally beautiful young lady in the village of Circa, and maybe even in all the villages of Alaska combined. He would have gladly traded places with Buck at that very moment, wounded leg and all, even with the possibility of having rabies, just to have Phyllis at his side, clutching onto his arm instead. She had long, black hair extending down to her shoulder blades that always appeared soft and shiny with silky perfection, her skin having a light-brown, smooth complexion, an attractive, gorgeous face with light makeup and no impurities, and a twinkle in her seductive brown eyes, which often pierced through a man like cupid’s arrows. But she also always appeared to be friendly, humble, and happy, far from a snob, and often displaying her sparkling white, perfect teeth with her beautiful smile.

And the perfume she wears is the best smell in the world, thought Ron. *If her beauty and wonderful personality couldn’t win a man’s heart over quickly, her 5’4” and 105-pound, tight, petite, lithe body could!* He was envious of Buck, as he cared for her

deeply, but would never dare to admit it, for he knew that she loved Buck and that her heart belonged to him. *They are perfect for each other,* he often thought or said.

They were all about to enter through the clinic door when Doctor Jones stepped out, locking the door behind him.

"Looks like we caught you just in the nick of time," said Buck.

"Yes, but I'm sorry that we have to close down an hour early tonight," replied Doctor Jones. "I recently received tragic news from the village of Hublick that the dead body of a fifteen-year-old girl was recently discovered 100 yards from the village, at the edge of a creek! The FBI called me from their Fairville office, asking if I would fly up there as soon as possible in my Cessna to do an autopsy on the poor girl."

Doctor Jones had been a medical doctor and surgeon for over thirty years in Fairville, but retired three years ago, after his wife of twenty-eight years, Judy, passed away from cancer. And now, he dedicated his remaining days flying to various villages throughout Alaska, offering his medical help and services to the clinics there. The FBI and state police also occasionally recruited him for help with autopsies and medical forensics in those villages, whenever the need arose.

"I'm sorry about the girl. That's very sad news!" said Phyllis. She, being only eighteen and at a very young age herself, thought how terrible it would have been to die at fifteen.

Doctor Jones paused momentarily and began shaking his head. "I'm afraid I'll have a very difficult job with this autopsy, if what the FBI told me over the phone were true. Reports are that the girl's body was drained of all her blood, and that she had two puncture wounds on her neck. Who or what in Alaska would want or take all of her blood?! I've never heard of anything this disturbing in all my years in the medical profession, and it makes me suspicious of the possible involvement of an evil cult doing some sort of sadistic ritual!"

Ron, Buck, and Phyllis stood silent, in shock and disbelief from the tragic news, unable to think of any comforting words to say.

"I'm sorry to dump this tragic news on the three of you," said the doctor. "Before I leave for my airplane, what can I quickly help you with? Is your leg okay, Buck?"

"Yes, and amazingly, it's starting to feel like it's healing up fast! Those antibiotics must be powerful and fast working. We were all just wondering about the wolf, and whether it had rabies or some other disease. Did you find anything unusual?"

"I'm afraid the wolf is a mystery case for me also. I inspected it two hours ago, from head to tail, did blood test, and couldn't find anything wrong with the wolf, other than two weird puncture wounds on its lower back, just over its hips, as if it were bitten by some unknown animal, possibly a wolverine or weasel. The good news for you is that it didn't have rabies, so that's a positive. Just in case, though, I loaded the wolf in my airplane an hour ago, and plan to fly it, and possibly the Hublick girl's body also, back to Fairville, where they have much better lab equipment, and I can get more confirmed results. My nurse will be here at the clinic, if your leg acts up again. She'll be able to help you. I should be back in a week."

“Thanks, Doc. But I should be fine. Good luck and I will talk to you again after you return,” replied Buck.

August 18, 2010, 11:30 PM

Buck lay writhing on the peat moss forest floor in painful agony, not knowing what was currently happening to him. He had felt great since the time when he last saw Doctor Jones leaving the clinic, just a few days earlier, and the deep lacerations on his left thigh, which occurred from the wolf’s bite, had miraculously healed by the following morning and day. In fact, he had felt better during the past couple of days than he remembered feeling in a very long time, as if he were on some exciting new miracle drug.

On this night, however, he now felt worse than he had ever remembered feeling in a very long time. He first began feeling agitated. Then there were the aches. And then he felt ill while watching TV an hour earlier at his cabin, and had rapidly declined since. He was now having the chills followed with hot flashes, as if he had a high body temperature of 120 degrees and felt as if he was burning up, causing him to sweat profusely. He figured that he had a bad fever, swallowed three tablets of ibuprofen, and went outside for a quick walk in the moonlight, hoping the fresh, cool night air would help, even if only a little. But instead, his condition worsened and regressed.

The neuromuscular pain that soon followed, along with the muscle spasms, convulsions, small seizures, and intense stomach cramping he was now feeling and experiencing, were excruciating, causing him to nearly pass out from his intense pain, which also felt to Buck as if his painful condition were possibly ten times more agonizing than he imagined it might feel like if he were being devoured by an army of fire ants, or anything else he had experienced during his lifetime! His heart was now racing, pounding through his chest, and he felt as if the organs inside his body were wrenching or ripping apart! His bones slowly begun to snap, crack, break, and fracture, and his head, jaw, and teeth ached immensely from his body and skull slowly reforming itself into something unknown.

After slumping down to the forest floor in pain, and now lying flat on his back in his helpless situation, he noticed the full moon shining down on him, like a huge floodlight, hovering in the night sky. His eyes were painfully sensitive to its bright light. The moon’s rays seemed to cut through him like a hot knife through butter. And then oddly and mysteriously, during a span of only five minutes, while he stared at the moon, the unbearable pain and anguish that he had been experiencing quickly began to diminish, and were slowly being replaced by new sensations: a feeling of great power, strength, agility—but also rage, as the moonlight and its rays seemed to be empowering him with a magic spell. Buck now felt as if a huge adrenaline rush, along with a combination of bipolar and hypomania mixed together, took control over him.

He had never felt sensations and euphoria like this before in his lifetime. He was now feeling superhuman, and no one could stop him from doing whatever he wanted to do! He loved the feeling, but also now felt like he would have difficulty controlling it, unsure if he even wanted to control or stop it. Disturbing thoughts of violence begun to flood his mind, followed by overwhelming predatory instincts

to hunt, stalk, chase, and ambush something or someone! The desires to bite, kill, and rip or tear apart a fleeing victim or prey, whether the victim were an animal or human, seemed to no longer make a difference with him, as his human emotions, conscience, and morality of right and wrong were now nearly nonexistent!

His whole skull had now nearly completely reformed into a different shape, larger in size, from that of human into that of a horrific head and face of an animal, with sharp teeth, fangs, and different ears and nose. Along with his body, which was also changing, his new transformation was nearly complete, increasing in muscle mass, longer, animal-type hair, and lethal claws, quickly transforming into a very powerful, upright apex predator with animal instincts! A formidable, and potentially destructive, supernatural beast and brutal killing machine, that no-one would ever believe possible outside of nightmares! Terrifying sounds of chomping jaws and frightening growls echoed through the surrounding forest and night air like distant thunder, as Buck's humanity was now being dominated and replaced with a new horrifying monstrosity! A werewolf!

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CHAPTER 1

February 17, 2011

Carl Grogan of Fairville, Alaska, drove his Dodge Ram 1500, standard cab, 4x4, with its hemi V-8 engine, into the driveway of the local truck stop named Webster's for breakfast, with his good friend and passenger, Brian Griffith, who was also from Fairville, before beginning their 200-mile journey together, from Fairville to Circa, on a three-day hunting trip for caribou. Webster's had a restaurant, store, and fuel pumps, making it a very popular public place for truck drivers, touring companies, and tourists, along with the general population of Fairville, a city with a diverse population of around 100,000 people. Circa's population, on the other hand, was only around 300 people, and was comprised mostly of Athabascan Indians.

Circa was a remote village, located at the very end of the Reese Highway, northeast of Fairville, and ended at Alaska's largest river, the Yukon River. The Athabascan citizens who live there survive mainly on a subsistence lifestyle of harvesting berries and living off the land. This includes smoking and drying fish, like salmon caught from the Yukon River during the summer months; which helps preserve it for winter consumption, along with meat from various animals like moose, bear, caribou, and ptarmigan taken during the autumn and winter months. But other types of food, vegetables, and fruit, along with important and often necessary supplies, including medical and fuel, were usually transported to Circa via trucking companies, once a month if needed, or barged in on the Yukon River when accessible. Circa also had a small runway for small airplanes or helicopters to access if a medical emergency should arise.

Fairville is Alaska's second largest city, which is located in the central interior, approximately 400 miles north of the Pacific Ocean. It has all the modern facilities needed, like medical clinics, a hospital, malls, restaurants, churches, schools, an airport, and even a university, although one would only need to drive for ten minutes away from Fairville to find wilderness, if he or she preferred solitude. Fairville is a popular city for tourists in the summertime, when temperatures can climb as high as 90 degrees F on occasions, and daylight reaching up to twenty-four hours per day in June. But on the other extreme, it also considered a forbidden city in the wintertime, when temperatures can dip to –50 degrees F, and daylight as low as three hours per day, in December and January.

It was Thursday, 4:30 AM, and Brian still felt subdued by his early morning drowsiness, and in anticipation of the hot cup of coffee that he desperately needed and craved.

"I'm hungry and ready for a steak and egg breakfast," said Carl. "I could eat a moose right now!"

"I can tell. I've been hearing your stomach growling since the time we left your house fifteen minutes ago. Besides, you shouldn't underestimate yourself, as you

could probably eat two moose," quipped Brian.

"Yes, you're probably right. I'm a growing boy, a very hard worker, and I sure could use the protein," replied Carl, chuckling. "Certainly, much more is needed than if I had an easier job, like yours."

"I don't know how anyone can eat such a large breakfast this early in the morning. If we get a caribou, I hope you don't eat the whole thing down right there on the spot," Brian said, smirking with his clever response.

They were both taunting each other in jest, with provoking comments, as they walked into the restaurant.

"Smoking or nonsmoking?" asked the waitress. "Oh, hello, Grizz," she said to Carl when her eyes saw his familiar face and 5'11", heavyset, burly, 250-pound rugged frame. She recognized him instantly, for Carl was a thirty-six-year-old fuel truck driver who went by the nickname Grizz for his CB handle, because of his large size and touch of grey hair on top of his dark, thick, curly-haired head. He frequently stopped at Webster's for breakfast or lunch on a regular basis.

"Hello, Wendy," replied Carl. "We'll take nonsmoking."

"And bring us a lot of coffee please," said Brian.

"Please follow me this way, guys." The waitress guided them to a table in the back corner of the restaurant and seated them. "Would you like to order now, or do you need a few minutes?" she asked.

Brian didn't have a second to respond before Carl quickly replied, "I'll take my usual, steak and egg breakfast, medium rare on the steak, home fries, wheat toast, and easy over on the eggs."

The waitress chuckled and asked, "Don't you mean over easy on the eggs?"

"He's really hungry and ready to pass out," said Brian, amused with his own saying. "Bring me the scrambled eggs and bacon breakfast, with hash browns and sourdough toast, please."

"Your coffee should be here in a minute and your food in ten minutes," said Wendy as she walked away toward the kitchen with their order.

"I sure hope we didn't forget anything and brought everything we need for our trip," said Carl. "I'd hate to drive all the way to Circa and realize we'd forgotten several things. I've gone over our list a hundred times in my mind, from food, winter clothing, sleeping bags, and the tent, to our hunting knives, rifles, ammunition, the binoculars, matches, two five-gallon gas cans, and ibuprofen. Heck, I even checked the weather forecast, along with the road report, and it reported clear skies and good conditions for the next four days, with only a thirty percent chance of flurries on Hawk Summit, and temperatures not expected to dip lower than 35 degrees F."

"I'm sure we at least got all the important things anyways. Circa has a small store, which is decently stocked with supplies, if we ever get into a bind," replied Brian, as he eagerly begun to sip on his hot coffee that quickly arrived at their table just seconds earlier.

"That sounds good to me, Buzz," said Carl to Brian, which was a nickname he had given him back when they first met, four years earlier. Brian, being a thirty-six-year-old professional pharmacist of eleven years, was working the evening when Carl showed up with a doctor's prescription for twenty-five tablets of

Percocet. The painkillers gave Carl euphoria and a buzz; hence, the nickname "Buzz" was given to Brian by Carl. The two of them began talking that Saturday night about hunting, fishing, and their families, quickly bonding and hitting it off, realizing they had very similar interests, were of the same age, both married, and had a lot in common with each other. The only things the two didn't have in common with each other was their appearance, being different sizes and having much different hairstyles, as Brian, weighing only at 190 pounds, was much leaner for his 5'11" height than Carl, with his hair being a very short military style cut, and brown in color also, but with no grey hairs.

They had been friends since when they first met, and tried to get together for hunting and fishing excursions, along with family gatherings with their wives and children, on the holidays or whenever possible. Carl tried to avoid calling him Buzz too much, though, as Brian seemed a little sensitive to the controversial nickname. Brian viewed himself as a professional, strictly-by-the-book pharmacist, and not someone who would dispense painkillers for fun or recreation.

The two of them finished their breakfast at 5:30 AM, with Brian picking up the tab and leaving a $6.00 tip on the table for Wendy.

"Thanks for buying the breakfast, Buzz."

"No problem, Grizz. We better top your truck and cans off with fuel before we hit the road for Circa. I heard that the price of fuel there is outrageous, and there's only one fuel pump in town!"

"Agreed," replied Carl. "I'll pull up to the gas pumps, fill them up, which should easily give us plenty of gas for our trip."

The two of them started to feel some excitement engulf them, in anticipation of their traveling hunting trip up the Reese Highway toward Circa and the approaching caribou hunt that they were about to embark on. Carl finally finished fueling and they were on the road at 5:45 AM, and hoped to be in Circa by 9:00 AM.

"I may have to make a few pit stops in the bushes along the way," quipped Brian as they left Fairville. "I drank a lot of coffee this morning, and I am sure it will pass through me fairly quickly."

"Not a problem at all," replied Carl. "There are plenty of places to pull to the side of the road on the Reese. I've hauled a load or two with my Peter built to Circa on a few occasions, and there are no houses and often no traffic for many miles, just nothing but trees, meadows, mountains, and wilderness. It's paved for the first fifty miles before narrowing and turning into a dirt road for the last 150 miles. We also just need to keep an eye out for moose hanging out near the roadside when were driving. They can sometimes run or leap out in front of oncoming vehicles, and it's hard to see them when it's dark, especially with all the corners and sharp turns that the road has as it winds through the mountains. Moose are often unseen in the dark, just right around one of those sharp turns!"

Brian hit the load button on the CD player in Carl's truck and dropped in a Hank Williams Jr. CD.

"Then I guess we better play some good music to help carry us safely through, and help us feel and see the road, dude," quipped Brian.

"Fantastic!" exclaimed Carl. "It's very difficult to receive radio stations on this

road, and usually lose them all after going over Hawk Summit."

"No one is happier than me, hearing that the weatherman was predicting good conditions on the summit," said Brian. "I've never driven over it at any time during the winter, but only once in the summertime many years ago, and even then, I got a little spooked and nervous when getting too close to the edge of the road. I remember that it seemed like a long way down to the bottom, if someone were to accidentally and tragically slide off the edge!"

"That actually happened to a truck driver who drove for our fuel company, about ten years ago," replied Carl. "Around a year before I started working there, so I never knew him, but I do remember hearing the story from coworkers of his tragic accident. His name was John, and he was returning from Circa after hauling and delivering a load of heating oil there. It was in January, the darkest, coldest, and riskiest month of the year to drive this road. He tried to drive his truck back over the top of the summit during whiteout conditions, but instead slid off the side of the road, crashing to the bottom of the mountain. Coworkers were expecting him to spend the night in Circa and return the following day, but he instead came back early, so no one realized that he was missing until it was too late. They found his badly injured and bloody body frozen to death inside his cab, nearly two days later! Authorities estimated that he cruelly suffered for at least twelve hours before mercifully dying from hypothermia!"

"Horrible way to die," replied Brian. "Horrible!"

Hawk Summit had a peak elevation of 3,800 feet, and was in the center of the Black mountain range, 150 miles from Fairville on the Reese, which could be very unpredictable and dangerous in the wintertime when crossing over. The conditions could be calm and clear, with good visibility one hour and instantaneously change two hours later to high winds, blowing snow, and drifting, with poor visibility and whiteout conditions. The highway was narrow, akin to a small road, and icy on top of the summit, with steep sides that dropped hundreds of feet to the bottom of the valley, and it had no guardrails. Highway maintenance road crews attempted to keep the highway plowed and accessible as often as possible, but sometimes found their efforts a futile attempt, when high winds caused bad drifting, often just minutes after the highway was plowed. On rare occasions, the Reese Highway had been closed for safety purposes or from occasional avalanches.

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CHAPTER 2

It was now 8:30 AM, and the darkness from the previous night began to slowly fade away, turning into morning light from a new dawn. Carl and Brian estimated that they were presently within twenty-five miles of Circa, after having crossed over the challenging Hawk Summit twenty minutes earlier; which happened to be clear with no precipitation, and had dry highway conditions, as previously forecasted by the weather report. They were now just one mile away from the beginning of unit 25C, where they could legally begin their hunting trip for bull caribou, providing they each had a permit. The Department of Fish and Game issued just a limited handful of "bull only" permits for the caribou hunt near Circa during February, and Brian and Carl were the first two out of the ten fortunate recipients who received them. It would have been considered a long shot for even one of them to have drawn a permit, but when both of them drew a permit together, it seemed to defy all odds and be a borderline small miracle.

Carl eased his Dodge Ram truck slowly to the side of the small highway and stopped between two small clearings or meadowlands with scattered willow shrubs. "Time to dig our rifles out from behind the seat and put them beside us," he said. "There's a lot of caribou activity between here and Circa, and we might get our bulls a lot sooner than we expected. It's still early, and we'll take our time, road hunting for the rest of the way."

"Look at all the caribou tracks in the snow! They're everywhere and on both sides of the road!" responded Brian excitedly. "I'm going to get out and inspect them for a minute, and stretch my legs." He stepped down and out of the truck, shutting the passenger door behind him, and immediately took in a deep breath of cool, fresh air, while, at the same time, walking to the front of the truck. He began to study the tracks in the snow, which encompassed him everywhere, searching for the biggest tracks he could see, which would indicate the presence of large bulls.

Carl was quickly behind him after exiting the door on the driver's side. "Crap!" he barked.

"What's wrong, Grizz?" asked Brian with some concern in his voice.

"Remember at the restaurant, when I said that I went over our list a hundred times in my mind, being worried that we'd forget something?"

"What did we forget?" asked Brian nervously.

"Well, since we have at least a foot of snow on the ground, it would have been nice to have brought the snowmobile and snowshoes, that I forgot," murmured Carl.

"Ouch! That could turn out to be an unfortunate mistake for us," replied Brian. "If it makes you feel a little better, though, I didn't remember them, either, and I'm supposed to be the guy with the brains. No worries for me, though. I'm sure I'll

shoot my bull near the road, and if not, I can have you pack it out for me."

"Thanks, Buzz! I'm feeling a little better already, now that you said it like that."

The two of them began to laugh as they turned to walk back toward the truck, then Brian quickly stopped to gaze at unusual-looking tracks in the snow ten yards away and to his left, which he spotted from the corner of his left eye. They stood apart, appearing different from the other caribou tracks that they were studying just moments earlier, which was what caught his eye and seized his attention. He waded through the knee-deep snow to the tracks and discovered a single set of tracks, spread approximately five yards apart, heading toward the direction of Circa. "Come take a look at these weird and unusual-looking tracks, Carl. Whatever made these seemed to possibly be moving at a high rate of speed. I've never seen any animal tracks like these before, ever! And they look really fresh, too. Possibly made sometime during the night."

"Oh step aside and let the track expert come take a look at them," said Carl proudly but jokingly. "They're probably from a wolverine, or were made by a lone wolf." The befuddled Carl stood over the set of tracks, looking down at them in silence, and quickly began scratching his forehead with his right fingers in disbelief after he saw them. "I'm clueless also. Looks like whatever made them has two legs, stands upright, has a long stride, and runs really fast. Looks like a heavy critter made them, too! Maybe a Big Foot, if that's possible. If they even exist. If not, I honestly have no idea, because I've never seen tracks like those, either."

"Could be Sasquatch tracks, perhaps?" replied Brian. "They are shaped like the bare feet of a very large man, but also have claw marks over the toes embedded in the snow, similar to those of animal claws. Weird! Let's take some pictures of them with the camera, and when we return to Fairville in the next few days, we can show them to the Department of Fish and Game, and see if anyone there knows."

Brian snapped off ten photos of the unknown tracks with his Cannon camera from various angles after retrieving it from the truck, while Carl took five more pictures with his cell phone camera for extra measure, before again wading back through the snow and returning to the truck to continue on with a forty-five-mph road-hunt drive toward Circa. Brian also took many photos of the beautiful distant mountains and surrounding scenery along the way as Carl casually drove, and both of them enjoyed the luscious morning sunrise and the sun's brightening light shining in their face and eyes, while also intently watching for caribou.

"At this present speed and pace, we should be in Circa by 9:30 AM," said Carl. "When we get there, I want to go into the store and see if they have any snowshoes to sell, or maybe we'll even get very lucky and they'll have a snowmobile to rent also."

"Well, if they do, I'll gladly chip in my share of cash for one of them, but if it costs too much, then I vote that we just forget them and hike or wade through the snow to a reasonable camping spot, set up the tent, and begin hunting," replied Brian.

"That will be a tough hike through knee-deep snow," said the skeptical Carl. "I was planning on being a mile off the road, but if you're up for it, Buzz, then what the heck? I'll give it a try, too. The exercise might do me some good."

“Let’s go shoot the bull somewhere then,” replied Brian with a chuckle at his witty response.

“Take a look at that, Brian,” said Carl curiously, pointing his index finger in the direction of the passenger-side windshield and toward some nearby spruce trees as he drove around a small right corner in the highway.

“Wow! Let’s stop for a minute and see if they’re all feeding on something,” replied Brian, referring to a flock of fifteen or more ravens just thirty yards off the highway and to their right, with half of them sitting on the branches of two large spruce trees while the other half of the flock were circling and diving down toward the snow-covered forest floor.

Carl slowed his truck down, pulled over to the right edge of the highway, and stopped and shut the engine off after turning the four-way flashers on for safety. Brian quickly and excitedly leaped out the passenger door, threw his jacket on, grabbed his rifle, and waded through the snow toward the ravens, undaunted by the large flock’s loud cackles of protest at his presence, and unwillingness to fly off until Brian was within ten yards of a dead animal carcass that the ravens had been feeding on. Carl seemed less interested in the ravens and more content to stay near his truck and stretch, allowing Brian to do all the work with his investigation. Brian slowly walked up and stood over the moose carcass, which seemed to be approximately one year old, hoping that his inspection would quickly lead him to a cause of death, although he had assumed beforehand that the moose was most likely hit on the highway by an automobile, and walked off and died there soon after.

As Brian looked down upon the carcass, he began to feel nauseous, nearly gagging at the repulsive sight of the horrific, large, gaping wounds all over the bloodstained moose, with the most menacing lethal wound of having part of its throat ripped out, along with the foul-smelling stench from its pierced internal organs, such as part of the stomach and intestines protruding out from apparent claw wounds ripped into its midsection, which the ravens had been pecking away at and feasting on. *What could inflict massive, deadly wounds like this?* wondered Brian to himself. *Only a bear, but they’re presently in hibernation, and this poor moose looks as if it were ripped half apart and killed by something sometime last night, and at this very spot.* He walked around the carcass, inspecting the snow, in search for the evidence of predator tracks, thinking that he would discover the tracks of a large grizzly bear that had awaken early from hibernation, or perhaps hadn’t hibernated at all. *It’s rare,* he thought, *but not impossible.* But his face turned pale white as he, instead, discovered another set of familiar tracks in the snow, which caught him by surprise and sent a chill down his spine. Imprinted in the snow were the identical and unknown tracks that he had spotted and taken photos of just ten miles earlier, and which Carl had suspected were tracks made from a Sasquatch. *Whatever made these tracks seemed to have caught the moose from behind, cruelly killed the poor critter just for sport, and continued on toward the direction of Circa. The moose never had a chancel!*

“What did you find out, inspector?” asked Carl, who was still outside and leaning against the front end of his white Dodge truck, after he spotted Brian leaving the scene of the carcass and walking back toward his truck.

“You don’t want to know,” replied Brian hesitantly. “The carcass was a young

moose, and it was apparently torn half to shreds by whatever made those tracks ten miles back."

"The possible Bigfoot tracks that we took photos of?" asked Carl with dismay.

"Or possibly tracks from the Tasmanian devil, because I've never seen any animal killed in such a gross way, ever!"

"Well, let's forget about it and continue on, and hope this occurrence is just some freakish, weird, and once-in-a-blue-moon ordeal."

"Sounds like a great idea," replied Brian as they both climbed back into the truck and continued on toward Circa.

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CHAPTER 3

Carl drove over the small, one-lane wooden bridge that lay over a frozen creek, which led them into and through the center of the village, and had a "WELCOME TO CIRCA" sign affixed to its top rafter. Their first sight after crossing the bridge, which caught their attention and stood apart from the village, was the massive-sized Yukon River off in the distant background, mostly frozen and snow covered, along with multiple snowmobile trails embedded on top of its snow-covered ice.

They gazed around at the many old, rustic log cabins, buildings, and cottages, along with various small businesses spread throughout the village, like a bed and breakfast business, a meat cutter's business, a small Laundromat with a "PUBLIC SHOWERS" sign above the front door, a small post office, a public school the size of a small church, an automotive garage business, and a large shed with an opened front, which was similar to that of an airplane hangar and enabled them to see everything parked inside, like a fish wheel used for catching salmon during the summertime, along with several snowmobiles and four-wheelers inside. But they thought it to be odd when the village appeared to have no sled dogs, or at least none that they could see anywhere, and only a few elderly men and women were presently walking the streets, but no children could be seen walking and playing outside.

It also felt strange to them that any automobiles that they expected to encounter in the village appeared to be missing, but only a few four-wheel drive trucks remained. They continued their drive a little farther down the main street of the village, nearing the end now.

Brian noticed the medical clinic building on the right side of the street, at the corner and intersection of another small side street. "I wonder if Doctor Jones is there today," he said. "I haven't seen or heard from him in over three years, since his retirement from the medical profession in Fairville. I'll make sure that I stop in and say hello, or leave a message for him, before our trip back home. I used to fill a lot of his patients' prescriptions before his retirement."

"Here's the store," said Carl excitedly, as if he didn't hear a word that Brian just spoke about Doctor Jones or the clinic. He turned the steering wheel to his left and drove into a parking lot that led to a medium-sized log building surrounded by forest trees on three sides, a gas pump affixed at one end of the lot to their left, and an old wood shed at the opposite end of the lot to their right. There was also an old pay phone on the outside of the building, near the front entrance door.

It was the Circa general store, and Brian first noticed the fuel price label on the pump read $7.00 per gallon, and that the fuel gauge on Carl's truck was now at half a tank, bringing out an instantaneous negative reaction from him. He said, "We drove 200 miles and your truck is already down to half a tank! Wow! Glad we brought those extra gas cans with us. Buying gas here would be a little expensive."

Carl drove up to the front of the building, put the truck's transmission into park, and turned the ignition off. They were the only customers in the store's parking lot at that time. Upon entering the store through an old, thick, wooden door entrance with jingling chimes overhead, Carl, who entered first, began to slowly gaze his eyes around the inside of the shop, trying to spot any snowshoes that might be hanging on a wall for display, while Brian quickly noticed an animal head to his right—a mounted wolf's head hung high on the top of the left-side wall, near the ceiling, along with a black bear's and caribou bull's head, with a set of incredible-sized antlers, mounted beside and to its right. They both also noticed two refrigeration coolers with glass doors straight ahead against the back wall in the rear of the store, stocked with cases of beer and soda, wrapped sandwiches, and packages of hot dogs, near several wooden shelves mounted to the back wall, which were stocked with an assortment of canned foods, candy, and fishing supplies, along with some miscellaneous supplies like tools, ropes, and firearm's ammunitions. Carl turned his head and eyes toward his left, which was the right side of the store, and noticed another room at the end of a small hallway, which led past the counter and appeared to be a small kitchen, along with a set of stairs that went up to a second level, just before entering the kitchen.

"May I help you?" asked a female voice from behind the counter on their left, which had an old cash register on top.

They turned their eyes away from surveying the inside of the store to glance in the direction of her voice, and saw a very beautiful teenage native lady, with long, shiny black hair, displaying a nervous, but friendly smile.

"Hi, and, yes, to your question," replied Carl. "Do you happen to have any snowshoes for sale, or know of any snowmobiles to rent around here?"

"Um…I'm sorry, but we don't sell any snowshoes, and I also don't know of any rental snowmobiles here in Circa," she replied. "We never get any outside visitors or tourists during the winter months, but only during the summertime, so we're not really set up for that sort of thing. Most of the men from the village are gone for the week also; they went to Fairville and Anchor town with their families, and I'm not sure who to ask. I could call my good friend Ron really quick and ask him. He's our village mechanic."

"No, that's okay. I think that we'll survive without them," replied Carl.

"But thank you anyway," said Brian, quickly joining the conversation. "My name is Brian and this is my friend Carl. We're from Fairville."

"Hello, my name is Phyllis," she said while flashing her beautiful smile. "Forgive me if I seem a little surprised by your presence. May I ask what brings you both to Circa, and will you be leaving before tonight?"

Interesting question, thought Brian before responding. "Actually, were planning on spending a few days around here to go caribou hunting, but we forgot our snowshoes and snowmobile. We're not afraid to hike off the road a mile or two, though, if necessary. We want to set a tent up just a few miles out of town."

"Oh…I'm not sure if that's a very good idea right now," replied Phyllis hesitantly. "Any chance I can persuade you both to come back in a week instead to hunt then? Most of the men will be back at that time, and I'm sure one of them could help guide you to the best area."

“I’m afraid not,” replied Brian. “These are the only days off from work we’ll have in quite a while, so it’s now or never.”

“Can I at least persuade you both not to stay in your tent for the next few nights then? My uncle has a local bed and breakfast cottage that you could stay in. It’s been closed down for the winter, but I have the keys for it and can reopen it, and I will bring you anything that you might need. Please stay there tonight instead, and if so, promise me that you’ll lock the doors and shut the lights off at around 9:00 PM. And especially, don’t wander around outside during the night!” said Phyllis with alarm.

“Sounds tempting, but why is that?” asked Carl curiously.

“It won’t be safe out there for the next few nights,” implored Phyllis. “There have been wolf pack attacks on caribou and moose just a few miles out of Circa, and our mechanic, Ron, has had some recent close encounters with lone wolves wandering in near the village at night also. Please stay in Circa tonight, or go back to Fairville instead, please?”

Carl and Brian glanced at each other, astounded that this beautiful stranger from the village would be very concerned for the two of them and their safety. But they also wondered to themselves as to why she wanted them to lock their doors at the bed and breakfast, and turn the lights off at 9:00 PM.

“We’re big boys now, and we can take care of ourselves just fine,” responded Carl. “But thanks for your concern for us and for your generous offer. You’re a sweetheart for sure.”

Brian and Carl said good-bye to Phyllis, who had a very nervous and worried look on her face, as they left the store, en route away from Circa for a few miles to search for the perfect place to set up their tent and complete their hunting trip plans.

“What do you make out of that?” asked Carl to Brian with astonishment.

“I don’t know,” answered Brian. “I’m just as perplexed as you. She really seemed spooked about wolves or something, and didn’t want us coming out here for camping tonight.”

“Probably, she didn’t want us to shoot any of their caribou,” quipped Carl with a nervous chuckle.

“Let’s forget about it for now and concentrate on getting our camping site set up, and bagging ourselves a caribou. There are caribou tracks all over the roadside for the next twenty-five miles,” said Brian. “We could camp anywhere we want, and I want a bull with a head just like the one mounted in the store, with the huge antlers on it!”

They both laughed a little and began looking for a good place to set up camp as Carl drove along the Reese Highway, past black spruce trees, willow shrubs, and meadows for several miles, until they finally spotted a small side trail on their left side, surrounded by black spruce trees and appeared as if it would take them a decent distance off the main highway, if they were able to drive all the way through and to the end. The trail appeared as if it had been driven on sometime beforehand and previously packed down during the past month, but had since accumulated about five inches of new snow on top.

Carl locked his truck’s transaxles into four-wheel drive, and easily drove off the

highway and down the bumpy, snow-covered trail, after both agreeing that it appeared as if it would lead to a potentially great hunting spot. They had only driven around a half mile when the trail finally ended at a place that they thought would be the perfect place to set up their campsite.

The place that they settled on was a huge, snow-covered meadow or clearing approximately 300 yards long and 300 yards wide, which gave them plenty of viewing distance for spotting caribou, and allowed for a fantastic shot with their identical 270 Winchester caliber, bolt-action rifles on any unfortunate caribou bull that happened to pass through. Carl parked his truck with its front grille and headlights facing toward the open meadow, or perpendicular to the Reese Highway, and shut the engine off before excitedly exclaiming, “Welcome to paradise! And I get first dibs or first shot at the first bull that we see!”

Brian slowly shook his head back and forth before bursting out in a small laugh. “That way, when you miss, I can follow up with my guaranteed lethal finishing shot!” he replied.

“I never miss!” Carl countered with a chuckle. “Where do you want to set up the tent?”

Brian took a quick glance around before suggesting that the spot ten yards to his right, and at the edge of the meadow, looked like a great place for a tent.

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CHAPTER 4

10:00 PM

Brian and Carl sat on small folding lawn chairs in front of their tent, with both of them admiring the Aurora Borealis, which is often called the northern lights, enjoying its awesome, flashy display dancing high in the night's clear sky, surrounded in the background by millions of glimmering stars and a very bright, rounded full moon, shining down on them through the chilly night air, after having just finished their cups of hot chocolate heated on a small propane stove to warm themselves. Both were beginning to feel fatigue creep into their tired, aching bodies after spending the majority of the day wading through the knee-deep fluffy snow in an unsuccessful search for caribou bulls. They had seen several female cow caribou wander through their campsite occasionally, but their hunting permits only allowed them to take a bull or male caribou.

Carl was beginning to regret forgetting his snowmobile, for they could have covered far more territory with much more ease had he not forgotten it. "I don't want to whine, but I'm really tired, and I'm ready for my sleeping bag and a good night's sleep," he moaned. "Maybe tomorrow, we should try driving up and down the highway for fifteen miles each way instead. We could cover a lot more area and territory that way."

"I considered that approach myself," answered Brian. "We won't wear ourselves out using that method, and it will increase our chances of seeing more caribou, I think. If we keep this slow pace up, by wading through the snow like this, we'll..." He paused for a moment, midway through his sentence. "Listen, do you hear that small, rumbling noise?"

Carl sat quietly still, holding his breath and listening intently for any unusual sounds or noises, before hearing the rumbling noises also. "Yes, I do," he answered. "Is that thunder?"

"No, not at this time of year. That sounds possibly like a large herd of animals with hooves coming toward our direction, like a stampede," Brian said with dire concern.

They quickly stood up from their chairs, grabbed their rifles, and ran the ten-yard distance toward the safety of the truck. The fatigue that they both felt moments earlier became quickly replaced with adrenaline. Despite the knee-deep snow on the ground, the stampeding sound they heard from possibly a hundred or more hooves bearing down on them became increasingly louder. They each stood by the opened doors of the truck, ready to jump inside if necessary.

"Turn your truck's headlights on so we can see a lot better!" exclaimed Brian vehemently to Carl.

Carl turned his truck's ignition one click forward after inserting the key, so power from the battery would enable the high-beam headlights to come on, shining its powerful bright lights a great distance out into the open meadow. The

two of them stared out into the meadow as far as their eyes could see, and as far as the headlights would enable them, in anticipation of the thunderous, stampeding sound that now sounded just seconds away. And then they came, one caribou after another, followed by many more, and many more after that, possibly a hundred or more, all running at full speed toward Circa, appearing briefly into the headlight's illumination radius from the west, and quickly galloping out of the eastern side, disappearing into the darkness again, approximately 100 yards away, directly in front of their truck.

"What in God's earth are they running from?" asked Carl aloud, and with alarm. "They're running like they're scared out of their minds! I wonder if they're being chased by something, wolves' maybe."

The two of them stood behind the truck's opened doors, their rifles in hand and ready to shoot, or they could jump inside the safety of the truck if need be. But they quickly began thinking that they had finally watched the last caribou pass by after the rumbling, stampeding noise of the herd begun to dissipate and grow quiet. Yet instead, they saw another caribou appearing again, straggling into the light, running much slower and quickly falling behind now after being separated from the rest of the herd. And then suddenly, to their dismay, appearing from nowhere and into the light also, in extremely fast pursuit of the herd and straggling weaker caribou, Carl and Buck saw the caribou herd's tormentor, and why they had been stampeding and fleeing with tremendous fright—a sight that nearly left them both speechless in shocked disbelief. A tall and upright-standing, frightening, brown, hairy, muscular beast, running with phenomenal speed, and in just two long strides, leaped onto the back of the last straggling caribou from at least ten yards behind, quickly biting into the back of its neck with extreme force, breaking its neck and killing it instantly with its powerful jaws.

"What in the hell is that?!" asked Carl with serious fright and alarm. He was not a man who was easily intimidated by anyone or anything, save possibly a bear, but he had never seen any animal or beast like this, and was beginning to feel terrified, to the point of trembling and nearly passing out.

The beast quickly turned its attention and head from its now dead prey to gaze at the source of bright lights shining on it, and to the loud, frightened voices coming from behind the light source. The beast, just merely 100 yards away, was still crouched down in a squatting position over the dead caribou, but now, while staring at their truck's headlights with its evil red eyes, it began slowly standing to an upright position, raising its snout or canine nose high in the air in intimidating fashion, sniffing the air with its huge nostrils in an attempt to catch their scent.

Howlooooooooooooo.....Grrrrrrrrrrrrrrrr! The hideous howling and growling sounds it made, equivalent to that of a screech owl and Tasmanian devil from Hell combination, echoed as loud as cannons being fired off into the silence of the still night, causing a paralyzing feeling of terror to overcome Carl and Buck! The two of them quickly chambered a round into their rifles and raised them up to their shoulders in a firing position, aiming them in the direction of the horrific beast, while trying to affix the crosshairs from their rifle's telescopic sights onto its impressive-looking and massive, muscular chest.

"Can you see it?!" asked Brian loudly and fearfully.

"My heart is pounding hard, and I'm shaking too much!" shouted Carl. "My

crosshairs are all over the place, and it's really hard for me to calm my breathing down enough to get a clear look or shot! What do you see, Brian? What do you see?!"

Brian was also having the same struggles as Carl with steadying his rifle due to trembling and hyperventilating, and decided it best to lean his rifle against the door of the truck instead. "I can see a little better, now that I'm steadying my rifle against the door, but I'm not sure if I have any explanation as to what I'm looking at, and I don't know if I even believe my eyes, or if this is just a very bad dream! This really can't be happening!"

"What do you mean?!" asked Carl vehemently, with a pleading tone.

"It looks like one of those brown, hairy werewolves from some of those horror movies that we've seen in the past!" exclaimed Brian as he studied the beast through his rifle's scope. "It has a rounded and ugly-looking, brown, hairy head with a snout, red eyes, pointed ears, and nasty-looking sharp fangs or teeth, and crazy-looking claws, too! And it's very muscular everywhere, like a very hairy hulk, and I swear to God that I see it wearing blue jeans, which appear partially torn up, along with hairy feet with claws!"

"What?!" asked Carl with extreme alarm and disbelief.

"Shit! It's starting to come toward us now!" screamed Brian.

The werewolf, which was now affixed on their position, began slowly trotting toward them, increasing its speed with each gait, while also furiously snapping its jaws and fangs at the air.

"Shoot it now! Shoot!" implored Brian. He leveled the crosshairs on the advancing werewolf's chest as best as he could despite their unthinkable situation, and quickly squeezed the trigger. KABOOM...BOOM! His first sight was the orange glow from his rifle's muzzle blast through his telescopic lens, as both 270 Winchester caliber rifles roared into the night, sending his 130-grain soft-point bullet traveling at 3,000 feet per second, smacking hard into the beast's muscular chest, and also instantaneously followed by the slightly slower but heavier 150-grain bullet from Carl's rifle, which had been fired simultaneously!

The stunned werewolf briefly spun around 180 degrees and staggered, as if it were drunk and dizzy, and trying desperately to gather itself, but quickly regained its balance. It briefly reacted by digging at its wounds with its claws and biting at it with its fangs, as if it were trying to bite and attack whatever was causing it pain, before refocusing on them and continuing on with its determined, rage-filled forward charge!

"Did we hit it?!" asked Carl vehemently but also with a glimmer of hope.

"I know we did! For a second, it acted as if our bullets hurt it, but now it looks even more pissed off!" shouted the frustrated Brian in response.

"Keep shooting!" demanded Carl.

KABOOM ... KABOOM ... KABOOM ... KABOOM ... KABOOM ... KABOOM!

Brian and Carl emptied their rifles, shooting into the direction of the charging werewolf, unsure how many successful hits they had accomplished, but now needed to reload again, with the werewolf only twenty-five yards away and closing in fast! If they did hit the beast like they hoped, then it had shed off their bullets as if they were just annoying bee stings!

“Screw this!” yelled Carl. “Get in the truck now, Brian!”

They tossed their rifles in the truck with total disregard, as if they were a bag of dirty laundry, while also immediately jumping inside and slamming the doors behind themselves. Carl already had his truck’s engine running by the time Brian’s door shut, slamming his transmission into reverse and pushing his throttle fully to the floor! The werewolf’s red eyes now appeared to be around ten yards away, as all four tires were in the process of spinning up huge chunks of snow and dirt into its direction, causing them to lose sight of the creature momentarily. Carl had to be going at least twenty-five mph in reverse when he quickly turned his steering wheel with full force to his left, enabling the front of the truck to spin and slide fully around to the right, until it stopped while facing forward, in the opposite direction. Carl slammed the transmission into drive now, and again pushed the throttle fully to the floor, hoping to increase the distance between them and the pursuing beast! SLAM! Carl nearly lost control of his truck momentarily when its tail end and rear tires were knocked three feet sideways from one swipe of the werewolf’s massive right paw, as it was now running just behind the truck’s rear bumper! SLAM! Another near-disastrous powerful swipe from the beast, jolting them sideways again, just after Carl had regained control!

“How in the hell is this happening?! He’s keeping up with us, knocking the back of my truck sideways, and our bullets can’t kill it, either! We’re going to die!” screamed Carl. “Why is this happening to us?!”

“Drive faster!” yelled Brian as he loaded up his rifle again with more ammunition.

Carl wanted to drive a hundred mph, but could only drive thirty-five mph on the bumpy trail, for fear of breaking his truck’s suspension in half, along with also still having the gas cans and some camping supplies in the back bouncing two feet in the air at every bump.

“We’re almost to the Reese Highway!” shouted Brian with a glimmer of hope in his voice. “It’s just a little farther! I know we can lose that thing once were on it!”

The enraged werewolf, determined not to let his fleeing prey escape, and wanting to rip them to shreds with teeth and claws, now leaped through the air from behind, and into the back of Carl’s truck, landing in the middle of the remaining camping supplies and gas cans with a loud THUMP! Its mouth was drooling saliva as its red eyes locked onto them through the rear sliding-glass window of the truck.

“Holy crap!” yelled Brian from the top of his lungs. “It’s inside the back end now!”

“Shoot it again!” demanded Carl as Brian popped the rear sliding-glass window open and pointed his rifle barrel out through the back, toward the werewolf.

The highway now being just yards away, Carl hit the last big bump on the trail at forty mph, which propelled the full gas cans and the werewolf upward, bouncing them three feet into the air, causing one of the full fuel cans to fall on the werewolf’s right foot as they crash-landed at the same time. The enraged and furious werewolf retaliated at the plastic fuel can by biting into it, puncturing it with its teeth, and shaking it violently sideways, back and forth, in his jaws, like a rag doll. The bitter taste of gasoline appeared briefly to distract and hinder the

werewolf's attack on them, giving Brian a desperate idea in just an instant. The gas can seemed to be stuck on one of the werewolf's fangs, and as it unsuccessfully tried shaking it off, Brian pointed his rifle barrel point blank against the side of the plastic fuel can through the rear sliding-glass window and fired! The extremely loud noise from the rifle's fired shot was deafening inside the truck cab, causing both men's ears to ring loudly, but Brian's quick idea and shot were successful. The speedy bullet caused an impressive explosion of the can, spraying gasoline and flames all over the beast's face and head, stinging its eyes, causing it to lose its balance and fall over the closed tailgate and off the backend of the truck at forty-five mph. And they mercifully and finally drove onto the highway, away from their attacker.

"Thank God," said Carl. "We better put some distance between us and that thing, and hightail it back to Circa! Just look at me! I'm shaking all over, and I also nearly wet myself!"

Carl's truck was spinning and sliding as he hit speeds up to eighty mph, seeing the campsite trail quickly fade out of sight in the rearview mirror. After maintaining eighty mph for one and a half miles, and noticing that the werewolf was no longer in pursuit or behind them, they slowly decreased the speed of the truck to a safer fifty-five mph on the snow-packed highway, while also breathing a big and deep sigh of relief.

"We better go talk to Phyllis again in the morning and see if she knows what that thing is, and if that was the reason why she didn't want us staying here," said Brian. "And maybe she has an answer as to why I saw blue jeans on that thing. Could it really be possible for a blue jean-wearing human to turn into something that vicious on a full moon? In the meantime, I think that we'll be safe if we sleep in the truck somewhere in Circa tonight."

"Sounds good to me," replied Carl. "Were only a few miles out now, and it might be a good idea, after all, if we take her advice and head back to Fairville first thing in the morning. I suddenly don't feel like hunting caribou anymore. We can call our wives in the morning, too, and let them know the scoop, as in we'll be returning home early, but not the whole scoop, if you know what I mean."

"Agreed," replied Brian as they slowly drove over the small wooden bridge and entered back into Circa to stay for the rest of the night.

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CHAPTER 5

February 18

It was 8:00 AM on a cold Friday morning, and Brian and Carl just awoke from a semi-deep sleep inside the warm Dodge truck, which they had parked on the health clinic's parking lot and kept idling all night, thankful that they were still alive and anxiously awaiting the sunrise that was just thirty minutes away.

"I got a headache," grumbled Carl. "I'll probably have an even bigger headache after I get out and inspect the damage done to the back of my truck by that hairy bastard! We have just enough light now for me to see, so I guess I'll go look." He slowly stepped out of his truck, stretched, and walked to the back, dreading the thought of seeing any damages that might be awaiting him. "Crap! I knew we should have brought your truck instead," he said with a sigh. "There are two huge dents in my rear panel, like it was swatted by a big bear!"

Brian was now at the back of the truck himself to see what all of Carl's fussing was about. "Wow! Impressive," he said and bent over to get a closer look at the damage. "There are five claw mark scratches in your metal, too, as if a large human hand with claws swatted it!" He retrieved a tape measure from the truck and measured the claw marks at two inches in length. "Shows up really well on your white paint also."

"Sticks out like a sore thumb!" responded Carl in a complaining tone.

"The store should be open at 9:00 AM," said Brian. "Let's go hang out there until Phyllis shows up to open it. I hope they have coffee also, because we abandoned most of our food and supplies at our campsite last night when we fled for our lives, and I'm not too interested in going back now, or ever again, to get our stuff. We can give our wives a call from there, too, then dump the rest of the fuel in our five-gallon cans into your tank, and then leave Circa as soon as possible."

They quickly climbed back into the truck and drove the short distance to the store's parking lot to wait.

"I can't get through to my wife on my cell phone," moaned Carl. "Don't have a signal! How about you, Buzz?"

"Nope, I don't have a signal, either," replied Brian. "We may have to dig our quarters and change out of our pockets and try that old pay phone, next to the front of the store."

"You're in luck then, because my glove box has a bunch of quarters in it," said Carl. "You can call your wife first, and just tell her to pass the same message to my wife also, because I'm not totally sure if we have enough quarters to make more than one call from here."

They counted all the quarters that they could find in the truck's glove box, along with any loose change in their pockets, and came up with $8.25 worth. Carl

sat inside his truck while Brian talked briefly to Nancy, his wife of six years, on the pay phone, continuing to put multiple quarters in the phone's slot, hoping not to get cut off while he was talking to her.

Carl noticed a look of extreme concern on Brian's face after he hung up the phone and returned to the truck. "What's wrong?" he asked. "Is everything okay?"

"I'm afraid the news couldn't be any worse for us," answered the despondent Brian.

Carl's heart sank with dread of the impending bad news that he knew he was about to hear.

"Nancy told me that the local news channels are reporting that Hawk Summit will most likely be shut down and closed for two or three days, meaning that we're trapped here! Even though we've had good weather here, and they've had good weather in Fairville, Hawk Summit has had blizzard conditions, whiteouts, and a small avalanche that's blocking the highway! No one is coming into or leaving Circa until the highway is cleared!"

"Are you serious?!" responded Carl loudly. "We're stuck here in this village with that hairy thing that tried to kill us still out there on the loose somewhere?! I guess that avalanche also explains why we haven't seen any other hunters, either."

No sooner had Carl finished his rant of irritation when they spotted Phyllis walking up to the store's front door, unlocking it, and entering inside. Then they saw the store's bright, neon-lighted "OPEN" sign come on just seconds after.

"Did you tell Nancy what happened to us last night?" asked Carl to Brian.

"No, I didn't say a word to her about it. If she even believed it, and didn't think that I had gone crazy, wacko, or dreamt up that story, she would be worried to death! I'd rather not tell her unless I have to."

"Sounds like Jessica also," replied Carl, referring to his thirty-eight-year-old wife of ten years. "She always worries when I'm away, or doing overnight truck deliveries. And when she worries, it causes our little girl to worry also!" he said added, referring to his six-year-old daughter, Cindy. "I can usually tell when they're worrying, too, because their faces will turn blushing red, and almost match the color of their identical red hair as well. Let's go talk to Phyllis now and see if we can get some answers. Hopefully, she'll offer us that bed and breakfast again. We need a place to stay for the next few days that has a shower and stove so that we can cook ourselves some hot food."

"After Phyllis gets one whiff of you, and me, too, of course, she'll beg us both to take a shower at the bed and breakfast," replied Carl with a chuckle.

Carl and Brian walked into the store, and after closing the door behind them, they continued walking up to the counter where Phyllis was standing behind. Tears started to well up in her eyes, along with facial expressions of guilt, grief, and also relief when she saw them.

"We need to talk," said Brian to her.

Phyllis pulled a tissue from the tissue box on the top of the counter and wiped dry her tearful eyes as she walked over and locked the front door, followed by unplugging the neon-lighted "OPEN" sign, turning it off. "What happened out there last night?" she asked with dread. "Did you see or encounter anything that is hard to believe?"

“Some unexplainable, large, hairy beast with fangs and claws almost killed us last night!” snapped Carl. “Granted, you did try to give us some kind of a lame warning last night, and we sort of didn’t listen, I’ll give you that, but if you know something about whatever that thing is, then we demand to know!”

“Easy, Carl, settle down please,” pleaded Brian to him in a calm voice, while Phyllis became even more tearful again.

“I’m sorry,” replied the choked-up Phyllis. “I should have tried harder to stop you guys from camping out there, but what could have I really done, or said, that would have convinced you two? I just don’t know what to do anymore!”

“Fair point,” replied the now sympathetic Carl, who felt slightly guilty for his fiery response. “And I’m sorry I snapped at you like I did.”

“Why don’t the three of us sit down somewhere and finish this conversation over a cup of coffee?” Brian suggested. “We’re not going anywhere for at least two or three days anyways. My wife said that Hawk Summit had an avalanche, along with blowing snow and whiteouts! The highway is closed and blocked off, and we’re stuck here until it’s reopened again.”

“That’s terrible news!” replied Phyllis. “I’m sorry to hear that.” She guided them down the small hallway past the counter and sat them down at a table in the kitchen area of the store. “Excuse me for a moment.” She walked up to the kitchen counter, retrieved something from the cupboard before making something hot to drink, and returned to the table with three cups of coffee, sitting down on the opposite side of them. “Here are the keys to my uncle’s bed and breakfast cottage.” She handed them two silver-colored keys. “One key is for the dead bolt and the other key is for the doorknob. It’s the least that I can do after what you both have been through! It’s the small cottage on the right, just after you cross over the wooden bridge, next to the small building with the ‘WILD FISH AND GAME, MEAT CUTTERS’ sign on it.”

“Thank you from both of us,” replied Brian.

“The cottage used to belong to my parents, but after they were both killed by a drunk driver last year on the Reese Highway, my uncle continued to manage it, along with helping to take care of me,” she said.

“Were sorry for your tragic loss,” Carl offered.

“The creature that you encountered last night is my boyfriend, and his name is Buck Holmberg,” explained Phyllis hesitantly, as she began to elaborate and go into more details.

Carl and Brian were bewildered and speechless, but also skeptical when hearing her words, but remained silent as to let her continue with her story.

“Buck was out caribou hunting last August when he got attacked and bitten in the leg by a rogue lone wolf. At that time, we didn’t know whether anything was wrong with the wolf or not, until it was too late. It was tested here for rabies and sent to Fairville for more testing, and nothing was found wrong with the wolf, other than two puncture or bite wounds on its back. And after Buck’s wounds miraculously improved by the next day, we were sure everything was going to be fine,” Phyllis continued with her difficult story while constantly fighting back tears, as Carl and Brian listened intently. “But a few nights later, something unexplainable, unearthly, and unthinkable happened to him that still haunts him

and us even now, six months later! During the full moon's cycle in August, and also every month since then, Buck will turn into that creature you encountered last night, and transform into some vicious, half-man and half-wolf creature, an uncontrollable monster that will try and kill anything it can! It's as if Buck has some terrible evil curse!"

Brian handed Phyllis some more tissues, as she was continuously choked up with tears and sad emotions from telling her devastating story.

"It sounds like you're telling us that Buck is a werewolf," observed Carl. "I guess that explains why the beast we saw last night had torn blue jeans on, and looked like a werewolf or wolf man from the movies. Unbelievable!"

"What makes his transformation even worse is that he will start turning even when the moon is only ninety-five percent full," said the despondent Phyllis as she continued on. "When you encountered him last night, the moon was at ninety-nine perfect full. Starting tonight and for the following two nights after that, the moon will be completely full, and Buck will be at full strength and power!"

"What did you say, and what do you mean?" asked Carl with alarm.

"Yes, please elaborate more if you could," said Brian.

"When you encountered him, he wasn't completely at full strength, but tonight, he will be. He turns for a total of five days in a month, and since he started turning on Wednesday night, he has three more nights left, Sunday night, and then he'll be free until next month's full moon cycle," answered Phyllis.

"No way!" replied Carl with dire alarm. "We couldn't come close to stopping him last night, and tonight you say he'll be at full strength?! If we encounter him again, we're screwed. We are definitely screwed! And we're dead men!"

Phyllis began to weep, and Brian and Carl felt helpless to comfort her or themselves.

"Please don't hurt him," she pleaded.

"Hurt him?" asked the perplexed Carl. "How? He nearly took us and my truck down at the same time, and our rifle bullets had little effect on him!"

"I'm praying that when our twenty-four hours of daylight finally comes in the early summer months, it will stop his transformations, for at least a few months," said Phyllis. "But we don't really know that as of yet, since this summer will be his first as a werewolf." She continued to tell them more. "Doctor Jones from our clinic was working with Buck religiously to try and help him control and cure his creature side, but no medicine, therapy, not even hypnosis, worked!

"Doctor Jones?" asked Brian. "I know him. Is he still in Circa?"

"No, he isn't," answered Phyllis with heavy guilt and sorrow. "One night in October, during the full moon, the doctor was working to help Buck control it, but got himself killed instead when Buck attacked him, mutilating and ripping his throat out during his transformation. Buck had even chained himself down to a concrete floor beforehand for safety, but his powerful creature still managed to break its chains and killed Doctor Jones!"

Brian and Carl were stunned and saddened by the tragic news, while at the same time, in awe of the werewolf's strength and power.

"Buck has never forgiven himself for killing the doctor, even though he was helpless to control the creature, and he still feels heavy guilt for it," she said. "He

now demands that I drive him at least twenty-five or thirty miles out of Circa, and drop him off before nightfall to hopefully prevent him from hurting anyone else ever again."

Brian quickly remembered the unknown tracks that he and Carl had seen in the snow just off the highway, twenty-five miles before Circa, along with the shredded moose carcass ten miles farther, when driving in. He was slowly beginning to put the pieces of the tracks' mystery puzzle together in his mind, which also included their encounter with Buck's werewolf while camping.

"Last night, when we got attacked by Buck, did you take him twenty-five miles out again, like the other past times?" asked Brian to Phyllis.

"I tried, but we got off to a later start than usual, and he started to feel himself transform before we were even halfway to the usual drop-off spot, so I had to drop him off at around eight miles out instead. I didn't have any idea where you two were camping, I promise! I tried to do the best that I could."

Brian and Carl paused momentarily.

Then Brian said, "We know that, Phyllis. We also know that this isn't your fault."

"I could never blame you, either," said Carl. "Where are all the people from your village anyways? We haven't seen many people in the last couple of days. And no sled dogs, either."

"Most of the citizens from Circa will try and leave for Fairville or Anchor town on the week of the full moon cycle, and then return on the following week," she replied. "They're just as afraid of risking potential harm to Buck, as much as they're afraid of Buck harming them! So they choose to leave the village instead, hoping to ensure everyone's safety by doing so. And the sled dogs were all killed by Buck's wolf side on the August night of his first transformation, so no one has ever brought any more dogs back since."

"What about the people who can't leave Circa?" asked Brian.

"There are a handful of people who can't leave, so they stay inside their homes during the nights of a full moon cycle, lock their doors, and shut their lights off early, mostly for precaution. I choose to stay here with them, just in case they need help or supplies, and I also want to be here for Buck, to support him. And all of the homes in our village have heavy doors and steel bars on the windows, for precaution, but thankfully, they haven't been tested yet. We once found Buck's werewolf tracks in the snow here in the village, where he somehow managed to wander into during the night, even after I dropped him off far outside of Circa. But thankfully, nobody's house was attacked or broken into by it."

"So that's why you wanted us to lock the doors, shut off the lights early and not wander outside during the night at the bed and breakfast cottage," responded Carl, "for precaution."

"It sounds like you're a very important, unselfish, and helpful person to everyone here," said Brian.

"I agree," chimed in Carl quickly. "The world needs more compassionate and selfless people like you."

"Thanks," replied the humbled and blushing Phyllis.

"Does anyone outside of Circa know about this?" asked Brian.

“No, and please, promise you won’t tell anyone, please!” pleaded Phyllis. “No one can know about this! The authorities will come here and take Buck away, and make him a lab rat! I just know they will! And I’m afraid I’ll never see him ever again!”

Brian placed his right hand on top of her left hand, gently squeezing, hoping to help comfort her. “We promise you that your secret stays here in Circa,” he said.

“Yes, me, too,” added Carl. “I promise also.”

“Thank you so much, you both!” replied Phyllis. “We also don’t even have a state policeman here in Circa; we’ve never needed any in the past. Our council members usually do a great job at keeping the peace here. No one except for us even knows about Doctor Jones’s death. After his wife passed away from cancer, he really had no family left, and considered us to be his closest friends and family. I know that he would have wanted it all to be kept a secret in order to protect Buck.”

“Where is Buck now?” asked Carl curiously or with curiosity.

“He’s sleeping in his cabin,” she replied. “He has to sleep at least six hours the day after his transformation, just for his body and mind to recoup or recover back to normal again. It’s like he was on some kind of super stimulated drug or speed all night and came mentally crashing down the next day. And it doesn’t seem to matter how far out I drive him before nightfall, he’s always in his cabin by early morning, sleeping. Somehow, his creature makes it back to Circa before retransforming back into the human Buck again.”

Just as Phyllis finished with telling them her story, several loud knocks were heard on the front door of the store. With that, Carl and Brian stood up, preparing to leave for the bed and breakfast, and thanked her for allowing them to stay there.

“If there is anything the two of us can do in order to help you while we’re here, please let us know,” said Brian.

“Thanks,” replied Phyllis as she gave them both a quick hug. She walked with them to the front door and reopened the store. She longed deeply to hug and kiss Buck. But she also felt as if a huge burden was taken off her shoulders after talking with Brian and Carl about Buck. *Confession is good for the soul,* she thought and realized.

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CHAPTER 6

10:00 AM

Phyllis opened the front door of the store as Carl and Brian walked outside, and past a stranger, who also happened to be the person responsible for the loud knocking sounds on the door. Carl gave him a quick glance and head nod before passing by, as to acknowledge the stranger with a hello, but was unacknowledged and ignored in return, as the stranger's eyes were focused and affixed solely on Phyllis, who was standing just inside the door.

Jerk, thought Carl briefly as he and Brian walked to their truck. "That dude sure doesn't look like he's from around these parts, either," he muttered to Brian.

"I'm sorry, Carl. I didn't notice or see him. But perhaps he's a new doctor for the clinic. If so, don't ask me how he got here, with an avalanche blocking the summit and apparently no vehicle or transportation that I can see anywhere, either. It's possible he flew into here with a small airplane, but who knows and who cares?"

Carl and Brian climbed into the truck and drove off toward the bed and breakfast for a while, to eagerly clean up, eat, and relax.

"May I come into your store, madam?" the stranger elegantly asked Phyllis with a charming foreign accent.

"Wow, I've never been called madam before," she replied with a giggle. "Yes, of course, you may come in. Please do." She felt her face blushing as the very handsome and elegant stranger casually walked into the store, dressed in a dark-colored, wool sport jacket, with a blue dress shirt underneath, and wearing black jeans with casual black shoes. His light, black-colored and medium-length hair was combed and parted perfectly to his left, resting on top of his stern-looking face. He had blue eyes, a slender, soft nose, and narrow jaw, giving him the appearance of European decent. Phyllis estimated his slender, but solid, muscular frame, equivalent to that of a soccer player, to be around 6'0" tall and 190 pounds, and his age at possibly thirty. She couldn't help but feel attracted to him, and enamored with his charm and classy, appealing appearance. "You're the third stranger to come here in the last few days," she said to him. "And I definitely haven't seen anyone dressed like you in a very long time. It's a pleasant surprise!" She then remembered and realized the possible danger that Buck's werewolf could present to him. "How did you get here with the summit's highway blocked and closed, and how will you leave?" she asked him, hoping that he wasn't planning on a long stay. "And you could freeze to death around here dressed like that!"

"I came here from a different direction, from the north, on the Yukon River," replied the stranger.

"Yukon River?" asked the befuddled Phyllis. *On a snowmobile dressed like that?* she thought silently to herself, before settling on the idea that he must have landed on the frozen Yukon in a small airplane with skis.

“I’m sorry,” he said. “Let me introduce myself. My name is Dietrich. And your name is?”

“Oh,” she replied after a brief pause, and with another giggle. “My name is Phyllis.” She extended her right hand to shake his, but instead, Dietrich pulled her hand gently up to his mouth, kissing it softly on top. Phyllis began feeling her face blushing even more with excitement, but quickly followed with feelings of guilt for being so infatuated and attracted to him.

“Phyllis, have you ever been outside of Circa?” asked Dietrich. “How about Alaska? Have you ever dreamt about seeing other places, like Canada or Mexico, or anywhere else for that matter, anywhere but here? Would you like to leave here and see exotic places, or the Western Hemisphere, maybe even the world?” There was a twinkle in his eye. “I can, and will, take you to wherever you want to go, and we can leave tonight.”

Phyllis was surprised with his tempting offer, to the point of feeling overwhelmed by it. “Wow! Really?” she asked. “Wow! You must be super rich, and I just don’t really know how to respond to that. I’ve never been farther away than Anchor town, and on top of that, I don’t even know you. You’re a stranger and I just…” She paused briefly, battling herself against new feelings of exciting emotions over such an enticing offer. “That’s a lot for me to think about. I couldn’t accept a big offer like that without thinking about it longer and getting to know you better. And I also have responsibilities here, with managing this store and a boyfriend, too. I need more time to think about it.”

“Well, I highly recommend that you don’t take too long in thinking about it, and lose out on such a great proposition, or, as you might say, a great deal,” replied Dietrich with a sinister smile. “I don’t plan on staying in Circa past 10:00 PM tonight, as I am just passing through. No offense to you or your small village of Circa, but there really isn’t enough people here at this time to satisfy me. I prefer to be in a location that’s slightly more populated. May I come back later in the afternoon and ask you again before I prepare to leave tonight? It’s the best offer I can give you at this time.”

“Yes, of course, you can,” answered Phyllis. “I can’t promise you anything, being that it’s such a short notice, but I will think about it hard until you return. I promise.”

“Excellent! I will see you again this afternoon, when I return at around 3:30 PM,” he replied before he disappeared out of the front door.

Phyllis felt a bit overwhelmed by various kinds of new emotions, sensations, and imaginations flooding her mind, which only seemed to further confuse her. A spirit of adventure enticed her, along with excitement and joy, only to be followed by emotions of guilt and sorrow when she thought about leaving her family and friends behind in Circa, who needed her. Especially Buck! *I’ll call Ron,* she thought to herself, *and ask him if he can come over this afternoon and talk about it. I’ll tell him about the offer that Dietrich made to me, and get his opinion on what I should do. Maybe Ron can even meet him, too.*

Phyllis felt perfectly comfortable with confiding in him about her new temptation and possible decision, to leave her village behind, and go with Dietrich. She had known Ron since early childhood and her feelings toward him

were as if he was the brother whom she never had, and entrusted him fully for personal advice. Phyllis hung up her phone after talking with Ron for five minutes, asking him if he could come by the store later to help advise her in an enormous, life-changing decision she needed to quickly make. Ron was currently in his garage and changing the oil in his truck, but promised her that he would come to the store at around 3:00 PM to talk.

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CHAPTER 7

3:00 PM

Ron walked into the store to see Phyllis, and she quickly ran up, giving him a hug when she saw him, despite the old grease and oil stain residue on his jacket, which didn't seem to deter her.

"Thanks for coming," she told Ron.

"Anytime," he replied. "What's this big, life-changing decision you need to talk to me about?"

Phyllis proceeded to tell him about the stranger, Dietrich, who came by the store, and his big, exciting offer to her. Ron eagerly listened to every word from her with great attention, as she continued in detail about her story for ten minutes, finding it difficult to get a word of his own in edgewise, which ended with Phyllis finally asking for his advice.

"No, that's crazy!" responded Ron in a scolding tone, seeming to be upset with her after hearing her story. "You don't know him, or who he is, or what he's like! He's a complete stranger, and he could be running from the law, or even a killer, for all you know! And how about Buck? Do you really want to leave him, your friends, family, and responsibilities so you can run off to who knows where with a complete stranger?"

"No, of course not," she answered with hesitation. "I love Buck more than anything, and I would never want to hurt him, but sometimes, I wonder what kind of a life and future we could have together, with him turning into a monster every month. And if we were ever to have kids, what of them?"

"I think that you should talk to Buck about that sometime, and if you decide to run off, he deserves to hear it from you. Just tell this strange guy that you need a lot more time to think about it, and that you can't decide right now. And if he doesn't want to wait, tell him no!" demanded Ron of her, albeit wanting to talk Phyllis out of leaving because of his own selfish reasons, like his strong feelings toward her.

"Well, maybe you're right, Ron," replied Phyllis, disappointed and feeling as if she was sorely chastised by him. "It is a crazy idea, I guess, now that I think about it more, and after listening to your input and advice. Thanks for caring about me and talking some sense into me, too." She had just finished her humbled response when the front door of the store opened, followed by the chimes overhead, alerting them to someone's presence coming toward them, and the sound of footsteps walking on the hardwood floor. It was Dietrich.

"Hello, Dietrich. This is my good friend, Ron," she said, trying to introduce the two of them, albeit unsuccessfully. "And I asked him to come over and meet you, and asked him for his advise also."

Dietrich ignored Ron, much like he had done to Carl earlier, only being

interested in Phyllis, and her decision. “Have you made a decision on my offer, my dear Phyllis?” he asked her with a little prompting.

“I’m sorry, Dietrich, but I’m afraid that I can’t. I really appreciate that you offered it to me, and for asking me, and it is very tempting, but I just can’t at this time. I have far too many friends and family here who need me at this time,” answered Phyllis. “Maybe another time, though, in the near future,” she added, not wanting to fully close the door on his offer.

“Indeed? I am really disappointed to hear that, but I’m afraid that I find your answer unacceptable. I cannot accept a no, Phyllis. Not from you!” responded an agitated Dietrich with determination to force his will on her. He lifted his nose slightly in the air, as to smell the precious and unique blood flowing through her arteries and veins, as well as feeling aroused from the wonderful smell of her perfume and sensual aroma. He took one step toward her. “Phyllis, you are such a magnificent young woman, so young, pure, innocent, and full of virtue! Certainly, I haven’t met a young lady like you in many decades, and you must come with me!” He gracefully raised his left hand to the right side of her head, gently stroking his fingers through her shiny, soft, and silky, long, black hair, caressing her cheek.

It caused Phyllis to feel uncomfortable, and she stepped away from him. Dietrich increasingly became more irritated by her moving backward and out of his reach.

“Get your hand away from her now, you pervert!” yelled Ron angrily at Dietrich. “And I heard her tell you no, that she won’t go with you!” He stepped toward Dietrich, intending to grab onto him and throw him out of the store immediately, but instead, unexpectedly, he found himself two feet off the floor and in the air, gasping for his breath!

Dietrich had clamped his powerful right hand around Ron’s throat and neck like a vice, and with one fluid upward motion, he easily lifted him off the floor with his outstretched right arm, as if Ron were just a little rag doll.

Phyllis became instantly frightened and horrified at the sight of Ron dangling in the air, and unsuccessfully struggling to free himself. She desperately began pleading for Ron’s cause, as his face was now beginning to turn red, and then followed by a bluish color, because of lack of oxygen from being suffocated. She begged Dietrich to release him. She felt powerless to help Ron, with her only being able to beg and plead for his mercy while Ron continually struggled, kicking his feet and desperately gasping for air like a drowning man. “Please don’t hurt him. Please let him go! You’re killing him!” Her pleas were in vain, as Dietrich sadistically continued to toy with Ron, killing him slowly. “Why are you doing this? You’re an evil, sadistic creep, and I hate you!” She was now pounding her fist on Dietrich’s chest with as much force as she could, albeit in vain, hoping to free her friend from his relentless grip, as Ron was nearly unconscious now. With one last desperate fight for Ron’s plight, she pulled a jackknife from her right pocket, opened it, and thrust the three-inch blade hard into Dietrich’s left ribcage, surprising even herself at what she was capable of when trying to save one of her close friends.

Dietrich responded with an angry, sinister smirk, undaunted from her attack and ignoring the knife. “Let me make you an even better and more tempting offer,

my Phyllis, one that I know you will have to agree on! You'll remain here at the store and not leave or go anywhere until I returned for you again at 9:00 PM. Then I'll take you with me wherever I decide to go! If you try to leave, or hide, or call anyone for help before I returned, I will find every living person remaining in this village and kill them tonight! And their blood will be on your hands!"

Phyllis felt sickened by his threats to her, and Ron was now unconscious and no longer moving, but Dietrich still held him in the air, as a display of his power and control over her.

"And just in case you don't think I will do what I said, or think that I'm only bluffing, let me educate you and give you a quick demonstration, Phyllis, as to show you who you're dealing with, and that I am serious!" Dietrich's facial expression turned to pure rage in just seconds, and ferociously transformed from the handsome European into a ghastly, horrific-looking, evil creature with semi-pointed ears, horrid, yellow eyes, and a grim, pale-white forehead and face, with dark eyebrows that made his features look deathlike! Long and black fingernails, appearing to be some sort of talons, had extended from his left and right fingers, which were still clamped around Ron's throat and neck.

Phyllis felt paralyzed with fear and was unable to move at the terrifying sight. Two upper fangs, at one-and-one-fourth-inch in length, had protruded from his upper gums, along with two smaller fangs, at only half-inch in length, protruding from his lower jaw, when he opened his mouth, and bit the unconscious Ron in the jugular after pulling him close and exposing the side of his neck while still holding him in the air, drinking his blood for five seconds, before extending Ron outward again. And in one fluid motion, he snapped and broke Ron's neck with one twist of his powerful right wrist before her very eyes! Ron's limp body fell to the floor, motionless, as Dietrich finally released his death grip, dropping him like a lead weight.

"Noooooooooo! Please, noooooooooooo!" screamed Phyllis, losing all of her self-control now, weeping, wailing, and visibly shaking from what had just transpired before her eyes. "What are you?! Why did you have to kill him?!" she shouted him with frustration and anger. "Noooooooo, Ron!" She continued on bawling and shaking her head from side to side from despair. "How did your face change like that?" she desperately asked Dietrich. She couldn't stop crying and sobbing as she knelt over Ron's dead body, shaking him in a futile attempt to find life in his body, unable to accept the fact that he was dead.

"I am not just a normal stranger, Phyllis, but a stranger who also happens to be a vampire, a very old vampire, and I've been alive for many centuries," answered Dietrich, who then pulled the knife's blade out from his ribcage and tossed it on the floor beside her. "I am very powerful. I cannot be stopped, let alone by measly jackknife blades, and usually get what I want, even if by force when necessary. And I will kill anyone, like your friend here tonight, who would be foolish enough to stand against me or in my way! And tonight, with the help of the full moon, I will transform you into a vampire also, and you will become my special eternal minion and mate, and will be fully under my control forever, if I desire! And after I do so, you'll also gladly drink the blood of humans, even family and friends as well, if need be, because that is what vampires do!"

"What?" responded the stunned Phyllis with tear-filled eyes. "You're a

vampire? And I will be also, and drink blood? What are you saying? I could never hurt my friends or anyone, ever!" She had never heard such repulsive words spoken to her ever before, which sounded so evil, sick, and wicked.

"Oh, I beg to differ, my dear Phyllis," he answered her. "You will drink human blood and not only enjoy it, but find it necessary to feed on blood to survive, and will have no choice! The humans will no longer be friends to you, but instead, will be considered as an essential part of your diet, who you will desire to feed upon! But unfortunately, I cannot turn you until the full moon, or else, I would have done so by force already!"

Phyllis shook her from head side to side in disbelief at the nightmare violently unfolding in her life. She remained over Ron, cradling his body, crying and mourning for him, as Dietrich seemingly vanished into thin air.

Carl and Brian drove into the yard of the store, deciding to comeback from the bed and breakfast to ask Phyllis if they could meet Buck. No sooner had they exited their truck when they heard the disturbing sobbing and crying sounds of a girl coming from inside the store.

"Phyllis!" exclaimed Brian as he turned to Carl with a look of worry and uneasiness. Both he and Carl ran full speed through the front door of the store to see what was wrong. Neither man was prepared for what they saw! It was Phyllis, kneeling down on her knees and crying over the lifeless body of a young native man lying dead on the floor of the store, with a small puddle of blood under his neck and head. "Are you okay, Phyllis?" asked the very concerned and shocked Carl. "What happened? Who did this?"

Both men somberly walked over to her, trying to hold and console her as she slowly stood up.

"The stranger who walked by you this morning as you left the store did this! He did this!" she said, while trying to regain control over her despair, and recollect herself and her emotions again.

"Damn bastard!" responded the furious Carl. "Where did he go? I'm going to find him and kick his ass, if not more!"

"Please, can one of you try to wake Buck up at his cabin for me and tell him to come to the store, please?" asked the despondent Phyllis. "Tell him that I urgently need him. I have to tell him what happened, and what's going to happen. Please don't try to confront this stranger Dietrich if you see him, please don't! I can't handle the thought of you two getting badly hurt too or something worse!"

"Are you trying to say that you don't think the two of us can overtake him?" asked Carl with curiosity.

"He's powerful, like Buck, but maybe even more. He lifted Ron up by one arm with the simplest of ease, as if he were a small fish he just caught, and killed him with just a twist of his wrist! He drank Ron's blood, too! I even stabbed him with my knife, and it had no effect on him! Even when normal, and not transformed, Buck is stronger than any human, but not as strong as that! Maybe after Buck has turned into his wolf man creature, he could fight against him, but Buck can't even control it anyways!" cried Phyllis.

Carl and Brian looked at each other in stunned silence, feeling nauseated, afraid, and barely able to digest what they heard.

“I wonder if he’s another werewolf like Buck,” Brian said. “If there’s already one, maybe there’s another one.”

“No,” replied Phyllis. “He told me that he is a vampire, a very old one, and he plans on returning tonight to turn me into one of those evil things under the full moon! And he also wants to make me his eternal minion and mate, and take me away, too! He seems infatuated with me, and wouldn’t accept no for an answer! I won’t lie, though. At first sight, I was infatuated with him also, for he was so elegant, handsome, mysterious, and wanted to show me the world, but that was before he turned into a devil!”

Carl and Brian were speechless, wondering if they would wake up in their beds at home if they pinched themselves, discovering this all to be just a really bad dream.

“He also said that if I tried to run or hide, call for help, or leave the store, he would kill everyone in Circa, and I believe him! I’ll even be forced to feed on the blood of humans, even my friends, too, after I’m turned into a vampire, for survival, and enjoyment, according to what he told me. I’m scared, and I feel trapped with no hope!” cried Phyllis. “Buck doesn’t have a phone, and I can’t leave the store to alert him. Can you help me?”

Brian and Carl gave Phyllis another hug of sympathy, hoping to comfort her through her grueling ordeal, and trying to calm her worries with some words of hope.

“Were sorry about the loss of your friend,” Brian told her.

“Werewolves and vampires, who knew?!” asked Carl, shaking his head from side to side in disbelief. “And I’ll be damned if am going to let any vampire, or whoever he says he is, or whatever he intends to do, come in here and take you away!” exclaimed Carl very angrily. “He’ll have to do this over my dead body!”

“Carl and I will do everything in our power to avenge your friend’s death and protect you, and I promise to do everything we can to help you,” said Brian. “This Dietrich will have to go through us first to get to you!”

“I don’t know how to thank you two enough for wanting to help me,” replied Phyllis while she dried her red, wet eyes with tissue paper. “I just don’t know what I would do without you both here. You don’t know how much you have helped me in dealing with everything so far. You’re such a godsend!”

“If this stranger really is a vampire, I think we need to recruit Buck’s help to try and stop him, despite the danger he would present to us,” said Carl. “From what you told us, it sounds like Dietrich might be too much for us to handle alone. But from what I saw of Buck’s werewolf last night, and how he took an adult caribou down with one bite, I’d put my money on him! I just hope that if or when bullets are needed, they have more of an impact on Dietrich than what they had on Buck!”

“Carl?” Brian said after thinking of a plan. “Phyllis can tell you where Buck’s cabin is, and you can go wake him up and introduce yourself to him while filling him in on Phyllis’s ordeal, and tell him that we all need his help tonight. I’ll take Ron’s body over to the clinic and properly put him in a body bag, and prepare him for an autopsy for sometime in the near future. Unfortunately, I have some training in body preparation, and have had to put it to use a few times over the

years." He turned to the distraught woman and said, "Phyllis? I know my request that I'm about to ask of you will be very difficult and hard on you, but I wouldn't ask you unless I thought it was important in helping us to stop Dietrich. We need to find some way to get him back here to the store again, about an hour from now would work well, so you can do a long interview with him. If you could pretend that you thought about his plan, and had a change of heart and will willingly go with him, or let him turn you into a vampire tonight if he desires, then hopefully, he'll trust you enough to tell you all about himself if you do some digging and ask him."

"What should I try to ask him that would help?" asked Phyllis.

"We really need to know his weaknesses and if there's any way to kill him, if he truly is a vampire and not just a really strong psycho who drinks blood," replied Brian.

"Oh, trust me, Buzz," said Carl. "When I see him, I'll find out really quickly what he is after I put several rounds from my rifle into him!"

Brian smirked at Carl's enthusiasm and bravado. "Phyllis, you're not going to be able to just ask him straight up for his vulnerabilities and weaknesses, or even if he can die. You're going to have to play him deceitfully really, really well, like a spy would in trying to discover top secret information," he told her. "For example, you could ask him how he is able to walk in daylight. How old he is, or how he came into existence. Is he the only one of his kind? And why does he need a full moon to turn you? Any info that we can learn might help us stop him. Do you think that you can do this? If you can't do this for us, then at least do it for yourself and for your friend Ron. I'm positive that he won't harm you, because it sounds like he desperately desires you too much."

Phyllis paused for a brief moment, and then responded, "Yes! I will help! Not only myself, but for Ron also, and for every one of the victims and their ruined lives that evil, repulsive creep Dietrich had hurt or destroyed in his past already! I'm not going to be afraid anymore, but fight back anyway that I can! I would even choose suicide over being turned into a vampire!"

"I'm proud of you, Phyllis," responded Brian. "But please don't think about suicide. Everything will be okay, I promise you!"

Carl nodded his head up and down in agreement with Brian.

"But how are we going to lure him back here?" she asked "Dietrich just seemed to vanish before you guys arrived, and he said he wouldn't be back until 9:00 PM. He could be anywhere."

"After I take Ron's body to the clinic, I will try to find an inventive way to find him, if that's possible. Circa isn't that big, and even if I have to walk or drive around the village, yelling his name from the rooftops, I will," answered Brian. "Hopefully, he'll find me and not kill me, but listen to me when he does, and I'll try to convince him that you want to see him immediately. Carl and I will meet up later, when you have him distracted here at this store, and we'll begin our strategy preparation for a possible showdown! Hopefully, Buck will have nearly recovered physically at that time also."

Carl chimed in, "We'll be loading our rifles to the max also, along with carving out three or four wooden stakes, too, just in case those vampire movies are

accurate, when they are killed with wooden stakes."

"We'll drop by the store after we think that Dietrich left, to hear what valuable intel you were able to come up with," added Brian.

Phyllis agreed, and instructed Carl as to the location of Buck's cabin. "It's a small trail on the right, just before crossing over the wooden bridge when entering into the village. Once there, walk down about 200 yards and you'll find a small log cabin at the very end. Knock loudly on his door, but if he doesn't answer, open the door and go inside, and announce your presence loudly. He never locks his door, and he could be still sleeping deeply. You might have to wake him."

"I won't get shot, will I?" asked Carl with concern. "Or even worse, get bitten or eaten?"

"No, I promise," answered Phyllis, slightly giggling. "He's kind of harmless without a full moon actually."

"Before you leave, help me load Ron into the back of your truck first, so I can drive him to the clinic," instructed Brian to Carl. As Brian bent over to begin lifting up Ron's upper body, while Carl was lifting his legs, he paused to observe and inspect the puncture wounds on Ron's neck and jugular area.

"What's wrong, Buzz?" asked Carl.

"Hmm, very interesting," he replied. "These two puncture wounds on his neck where Dietrich bit him." He paused, still thinking. "Phyllis?" he suddenly asked. "Didn't you mention that the wolf that attacked and bit Buck was found to have two puncture wounds on its back also, maybe like these ones on Ron's neck?"

"Yes, that's true," she answered. "I remember the doctor talking about it, and describing them. I also now recall him saying that he needed to fly north to the village of Hublick and autopsy a fifteen-year-old girl's body, which was found dead three days earlier, with two puncture wounds in her neck, too, and drained of all her blood! Her death went unsolved."

"Fascinating," said Carl. "Could Dietrich have killed that girl, and then also have bitten and infected the wolf with something, too, which traveled south to Circa after and bit and infected Buck a few days later? If so, I wonder how the wolf managed to escape Dietrich. Crazy!"

"I will try and ask him when I talk to him," replied Phyllis. "But Doctor Jones couldn't find any sign of infections through any blood test, and even large doses of antibiotics didn't help Buck, leaving him to speculate that Buck had been left with some unknown, supernatural curse after he was bitten. Also, the village of Hublick, where the poor teenage girl was killed, is also another village along the upper Yukon River, and Dietrich told me that he traveled here to Circa from north on the Yukon River."

"It sounds as if he's been traveling from village to village along the Yukon River, and Circa is presently his next stop. We're figuring out valuable intelligence information on him already," Brian said excitedly.

"We better get rolling and get this plan in action," added Carl eagerly.

Together, they loaded Ron's lifeless body into the back of the truck and left the store, leaving Phyllis with a small feeling of hope.

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CHAPTER 8

5:00 PM

Brian backed Carl's truck up to the loading dock behind the clinic, and knocked loudly five times on the building's metal freight door after exiting the vehicle. He quickly glanced down and noticed the ashtray that had been placed on the dock, beside the freight door, was filled up and nearly overflowing with burnt cigarette butts.

"Just a minute," a muffled female voice yelled at him from behind the door. Thirty seconds later, the freight door slowly opened up and a native lady, who looked to be in her mid-forties and who was the clinic's nurse, casually walked outside and onto the dock. "Oh my," gasped the startled nurse as she noticed the body of a lifeless male lying on the bed of the truck's body. "That's Ron! Please, no! It can't be possible!"

"I'm sorry," replied Brian. "I don't intend to be pushy or sound unsympathetic right now, but we need to hurry up, get him inside, and put him in a body bag and in storage until an autopsy can be done at a later date. I'll explain everything to you once inside."

"Okay," the nurse hesitantly replied as she helped Brian lift Ron's limp body from the back of the truck, helping to carry him inside the clinic and closing the freight door again before laying his body on a table. "What happened to him? Please tell me that Buck didn't have anything to do with his death last night, please tell me!"

"No, not at all," he answered, leaving the nurse breathing a sigh of relief at his answer. "A very bad man, a stranger with supernatural abilities similar to those of Buck's, was responsible for his death." He paused and added, "Let me introduce myself. My name is Brian Griffith, and I'm a pharmacist from Fairville. I knew your former boss and the physician here, Doctor Jones, for our relationship goes back many years. I used to fill a lot of his patients' prescriptions in the past, and we had a good business relationship."

"Doctor Jones was more than just my boss, he was my friend also," she responded. "Have you heard about what happened to him?"

"Yes, sadly I have. Phyllis told me everything about the doctor, and about Buck, too." Brian noticed her name from the tag attached to the white blouse of her nurse's uniform, which read, "Shirley."

"We need to call the Fairville authorities and notify them of Ron and his killer, who still is on the loose," said Shirley with concern. "It's the standard procedure, although it could take them a while to respond with the avalanche on Hawk Summit."

"Please, Shirley, promise me that you'll wait two days before calling them in Fairville," pleaded Brian. "I know it sounds odd, and it's risky for you to not follow

procedure, but I'm asking you to trust me on this. I don't have time to explain at this time, but please believe me when I tell you that it's crucial for you to wait! I'll take full responsibility for this, I promise."

"Okay," replied Shirley reluctantly. "Since you knew Doctor Jones, I believe that I can trust you. I'll put Ron in a body bag and hide him in the freezer in the back for now. But in two days, I'll have to make that phone call."

"Fair enough. And thank you very much. It's going to become dark in around forty-five minutes, so I need to leave now," he told her as he slipped back out of the freight door. Brian knew that he had to somehow find Dietrich, and quickly, but wasn't sure how successful he would be. The sun would set at 6:00 PM, making it twice as difficult, risky, and dangerous to contact or see him then.

"Dietrich! Dietrich! Dietrich! Dietrich!" Brian called his name as loud as he could yell from the top of his lungs, over and over again in different directions, while standing in the back of Carl's truck, which was still parked behind the clinic. "Dietrich!" he yelled his name one last time, with his hands cuffed to his mouth this time, hoping to enhance his volume and distance slightly more. But he decided to move and try again in a different location when he heard or noticed no response. "Who knows where he could be?" mumbled Brian to himself, almost ready to give up.

"Have we met before? I don't recall that we had. And how do you know my name, since I have never introduced myself to you?" a mysterious voice with a foreign accent asked him from the shadows of small willow trees, which separated the clinic from the Yukon River. It was Dietrich, slowly walking toward him from the trees.

At first sight, Brian didn't see a frightful-looking individual or beast, as he saw with Buck's werewolf, but more of a dark, handsome, mysterious, and elegant man, who seemed very smooth and alluring. He could understand why Phyllis had been infatuated with Dietrich upon first sight, as there was something magical and appealing about him, but also, at the same time, something inherently evil.

"Such a perfect time to be calling for me, as I was becoming a little thirsty for blood," added Dietrich in a sarcastic and frightening tone. "I was just about to search for an animal to feed upon, or possibly someone who I could whisk away for a drink, although it's not easy in this village, as everyone seems to be missing, but then you called, excellent!" In just a split second, he, who was at least twenty-five yards away when he was walking from the trees, was now in the back of the truck with Brian, now just one foot away, face-to-face and eye to eye.

The speed with which he moved was instantaneous and stunned Brian to the point of taking his breath away. "Wait! I have important news for you!" he desperately told him, fearing for his life.

"Really?" replied Dietrich. "And what important news would I need to hear from you? What possibly could be more important than having you quench and satisfy my thirst and hunger at this time?"

"It's Phyllis!" answered the frightened Brian while trying to keep himself from hyperventilating. "She wants to talk to you at the store as quickly as possible, and she said it was important."

"I know where she is!" exclaimed Dietrich in an agitated tone. "I'm the one

responsible for forcing her to stay there, or else I would kill all of her friends! And if you don't tell me something worth hearing quickly, you'll be the first one I'll kill!"

"I heard," responded Brian, nervously trembling. "She's the person who told me about you, and what your name was. She also said that if you hurt anyone else, she would kill herself before tonight." He could feel his legs shaking with fear, to the point of nearly collapsing on him, but was determined to continue seeing his important plan through. He quickly thought about his wife, Nancy, a beautiful blond with an infectious smile, and their four-year-old son, Josh, who would start kindergarten in September, and began wondering if he would ever see them again.

"Kill herself?" questioned Dietrich angrily. "Must I keep her restrained somewhere after I go talk to her just to keep her from harming herself before tonight?"

"Why do you want her so much?" asked Brian.

"I ask the questions, not you!" he answered loudly and angrily. "Recently, I've been observing you and another man, and you two have been in the store, talking with Phyllis quite a lot. I'm curious as to what you both have been discussing with her."

If Brian ever wished that he was a great poker player and could come up with the perfect poker face, it was then. "Honestly, we were talking about you, at least on our latest visit, which was after you killed her friend," he answered. "My friend and I managed to convince her to listen to you, and even go with you, in order to spare Circa and, hopefully us, from your wrath. Surprisingly, she listened to us and agreed that it would be a selfless act, and has had a willing change of heart, which is why she wants to talk to you, providing you don't hurt anyone else here. She also would like to learn more about being a vampire and what she can expect from being your kind." His response seemed to be the perfect poker chip, as Dietrich seemed to buy into what he was selling him.

"Excellent! I have often found over the years that humans are the same, regardless of what generation they come from. They are more likely to try and save themselves before others, like you and your friend, but Phyllis is not like that," said Dietrich with admiration. "She is meek and selfless, humble, compassionate, and thoughtful, full of morality and love for her friends, all the good and desirable qualities a girl or any human could have. Her innocence and beauty arouses me like no other! I could smell the virtue in her blood when I was near her, which is one reason why I'll take great joy in breaking her will, unique spirit, and love-filled heart when transforming her tonight, giving her, instead, a heart of evil and disdain for humans, even her human friends! A personal conflict that she won't be able to fight! Once she is a vampire like me, and under my control, she will have to feed on the blood of animals or humans like you and her friends, or die from starvation and thirst! The drinking of blood will eventually destroy her humanity and morality, and crush her spirit, fully completing her transformation, and that will be, and always has been, one of my greatest satisfactions!"

"So that's why you want Phyllis?" asked Brian. "To destroy her humanity and virtue just for the pure satisfaction of it?"

“That’s only part of the reason. As compassionate as she is toward humanity, she’ll be even more passionate toward the vampire life, and dedicated to me. She’ll be going from one extreme to the opposite extreme and giving herself over completely to me! She may fear me now, but she will be in servitude to me then! We will accomplish great things together, she and I,” answered Dietrich arrogantly. “I prefer not to turn humans into vampires, and would much rather feed on them! Turning a human into a vampire is rare for me to do, unless I need loyal minions or a mate and encounter a female specimen as enticing as Phyllis! I’ve had to kill off my previously created minions and another past mate, over fifty years ago, when they became too reckless and out of control, attracting far too much attention to our presence! Enough of the chitty chat now, as my Phyllis awaits me at the store! I will spare you for now, since you seemed to have helped me with my quest, but if I come to find that you have been deceiving me and trying to hinder my plan, it will be your fatal last mistake! You will die most miserably! Do I make myself understood?”

“Yes, sir,” answered Brian with relief.

Before he left, Dietrich paused briefly to look at the ashtray on the dock, which was filled to the top with cigarette butts. “It appears that someone inside is a chain smoker and needs to come outside to smoke often,” he said. “Smoking outside with a vampire nearby could be hazardous to one’s health.” He also noticed the dents with its claw marks, made by Buck’s werewolf, which was embedded into the back end of the truck. “Curious. Where did these come from?” he asked Brian.

“A bear was responsible for those, around last September,” answered Brian before Dietrich bent over to closely inspect and smell the dents for bear odor.

“Most interesting, because the animal odor residue remaining on the dents isn’t from that of a bear, but instead, smells like a combination of human and wolf. Curious!”

Brian didn’t have a chance to blink, let alone respond, before Dietrich vanished in an instant, while the darkness of the night slowly began to approach with the setting of the sun. He wiped the cold sweat from his forehead, and his nerves finally settled down by taking deep breaths. He remembered that Carl was at Buck’s cabin, so he drove in his direction to meet up with him. He knew that it would be very difficult to defeat Dietrich, maybe impossible, and desperately hoped that Phyllis could pry some kind of fatal weakness information from him. Dietrich was evil, inhuman, and possibly some kind of a supernatural entity, and he knew deep down inside that Carl and he needed to kill him, or die trying if necessary, for the sake of Circa and of mankind.

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CHAPTER 9

6:00 PM

Carl had just finished his 200-yard hike down the snow-packed trail as Phyllis had instructed him, and spotted Buck's rustic log cabin sitting at the end. The trail had paralleled a power line trail that led to, and supplied electricity for, Buck's cabin. At first glance, he estimated it to be an older cabin, possibly built in the early 1970s, and its size at 20x20. It had a fifty-gallon drum attached to the outside of the cabin, used for containing heating oil, with two five-gallon fuel cans underneath, had a metal roof, two small windows on the front, and a thick wooden door. He also noticed a packed trail that led to an outhouse, twenty yards behind the cabin.

As Carl approached the door of the cabin, he noticed many tracks in the snow of the front yard, some old and semi-filled with snow, and some fresh tracks mixed in, made as early as the night before. He noticed rabbit tracks, squirrel tracks, some older moose tracks, and then what appeared to be fresh, barefooted human tracks, coming from the forest thirty yards away and heading toward the door of the cabin. *Interesting,* he thought to himself as he walked up and began knocking on the door. He knocked several times as loudly as he could, but heard no response from inside acknowledging his presence.

He was becoming a little concerned now because of the fading daylight from the setting of the sun, and knew that his time was short. He had a small flashlight in his jacket pocket, which he figured he would need when exiting the trail for his truck after visiting with Buck, but also desired to put Brian's plan into action as soon as possible, before it was too late. In three hours, the full moon would be completely up, meaning that Dietrich would abduct and turn Phyllis at the exact same time Buck would be in his werewolf transition. After several more loud knocks with no reply, he slowly opened the front door of Buck's cabin and stepped inside, causing him to feel incredibly uncomfortable.

"Hello? Hello? Are you here Buck?" asked Carl in trying to alert Buck to his presence. He quickly glanced around the inside of the cabin and noticed a small monitor heater, which was being fed the fuel supply from the fifty-gallon drum outside. He noticed some old shelves, stocked with canned foods, and a box of cold cereal, cupboards, a propane stove for cooking food, a small refrigerator and microwave next to a cast-iron sink, a ceiling fan that hovered over a small couch, and a thirty-two-inch flat screen T.V. "Buck?" he asked again as he stepped farther inside and noticed a small bed in the left corner of the darkened room, with a long-haired native man under some covers, and still sleeping. *When he's wiped out, he's really wiped out!* he thought to himself. "Are you awake?" yelled Carl loudly at Buck.

Buck slowly rolled over to see who was calling for him, while at the same time, trying to clear and focus his blurry vision and eyes from their pupils' stigmatism.

“Do I know you?” he asked in a mumbling, half-asleep tone. He slowly lifted himself up into a sitting position. “Phyllis or Ron must have told you where my cabin was.”

What Carl first saw on the shirtless Buck were the multiple red and partially swollen welts covering his muscular chest and abdominal area. “What happened to you?” he asked.

“Someone shot me several times last night,” answered Buck. “That wasn’t you, was it? If so, then now is a good time to finish the job, before tonight!”

“Phyllis told me how to find your cabin,” replied Carl.

“I figured as much,” answered Buck. “You wouldn’t have been able to find my cabin otherwise, and if she trusted you enough to tell you where I live, then she had to trust you enough to tell you about my monthly problem also.”

“Buck, my name is Carl Grogan. I’m from Fairville, and I’m sorry to say, that I have some very bad news for you.”

Buck quickly snapped out of his drowsy state of mind and alertly demanded to know what the sad news was.

“It’s your cousin Ron, and I have to inform you that he was murdered today,” said Carl.

Buck looked as if his lower jaw was about to hit the floor when he heard the tragic news, and was fighting hard to hold back the tears that were forming in his eyes. “What? Ron is dead? Murdered? That can’t be!” said the despondent Buck “How? And by whom?”

“Ron was murdered by a very evil and sadistic stranger,” answered Carl. “Please accept my deepest condolences, and I am very sorry for your loss.”

“Why did Phyllis send you, a stranger, to tell me? Why couldn’t she come herself?” asked the curious Buck. “Is she all right?”

“I’m afraid that there’s some bad news with her also, which is the other reason why I’m here. Phyllis is in extreme danger from the thug who killed Ron, and she desperately needs your help.”

“What?! Phyllis? My baby doll is in danger, too? Please tell me she’s okay!”

“The stranger who killed Ron said that he plans on coming back to the store tonight, at around 9:00 PM, to abduct Phyllis and force her into an unheard-of life of servitude to him!” exclaimed Carl. “He also told Phyllis not to leave the store before then, or everyone in Circa would die!”

“What? Where is this stranger now? I’ll give that stinking moron a big taste of his own medicine!” said the angry and vengeful-minded Buck. “And if he lays one hand on Phyllis, I’ll literally rip him to shreds! I promise that!” He stumbled up out of his bed and began to get dressed, with retaliation and protecting Phyllis as his number one priority.

“Hold on just a minute, and please calm down, Buck,” pleaded Carl. “I want you to rip him to shreds also, and I plan on helping you, but there’s a whole lot more about this stranger that you need to know about before you go rushing in to tangle with this bastard. You’re not strong enough to take him on right now in your condition. You’ll need to be at full strength tonight, and I mean werewolf strength, to stop him! Phyllis is fine for now, please trust me on that.”

Buck stopped immediately from his plan of storming out of the door and

heading for the store, and sat back down on the bed to listen to Carl with a perplexed look of concern on his face.

"This stranger's name is Dietrich, and he claims to be a vampire," said Carl. "And from how Phyllis told us that he killed Ron, I'd have to say that he's not human, but indeed a very powerful vampire."

"A vampire?" asked the shocked Buck. "Vampires exist?"

"Well, until now, no one thought that a werewolf existed, either, so it does seem like a possible reality," answered Carl. "Dietrich intends to return to the store tonight and turn Phyllis into a vampire like him, and then run off with her to God knows where."

"What?!" responded the angry Buck. "If I lose Phyllis also, I'll have nothing to live for! We both lost our parents in tragic accidents, have no siblings, and now you say that Ron is dead. Phyllis and I will need each other more than ever, and I just can't lose her! We have to kill him, we just have to!"

"I totally agree," replied Carl. "My friend Brian has a plan, and I think it might work. At least, I hope it works. Before I fill you in on his plan, there's one other important thing you need to know, Buck."

"What is it?"

"It's very possible that the reason you're a werewolf is because of Dietrich."

"What?! Are you serious?" asked Buck. "Tell me more, please!"

"Before Dietrich killed Ron, he bit him in the jugular, drinking his blood, which left Ron with two puncture wounds in his neck. The same kind of puncture wounds that were found on the neck of the dead teen girl from Hublick back in August are the same puncture wounds that were found in the wolf that attacked and bit you. We now have to consider it a possibility that Dietrich bit the wolf, which, in turn, bit you a few days later, turning you into a werewolf. If so, it's very possible that you could be a new supernatural species, which was created knowingly, or unknowingly, by Dietrich."

"Wow!" responded the stunned Buck. "Sure seems now that I owe him double the ass whooping and payback then! But my first priority is helping Phyllis. What's your friend's plan?"

Before Carl could respond, they heard three knocks on the front door, followed by the door opening and Brian walking inside.

"Buck, this is my friend with the plan, Brian Griffith," said Carl, as he introduced him to Buck. "I told him about everything, except for your plan."

"Excellent," replied Brian. "And please accept my deepest sympathies for the loss of your cousin, Ron."

"Thank you," replied Buck. "And Ron was my cousin and my best friend also. But please, do fill me in on your plan, because I'm anxious to take a bite out of that vampire's ass!"

"Yes, and I'm afraid we don't have a lot of time left, so I'll quickly fill you in," replied Brian. "Phyllis should be talking with Dietrich at this moment, attempting to gain valuable information from him, which might help us to kill him."

"What?!" exclaimed Buck. "She's at the store with that psycho now?"

"She will be fine, Buck, and you'll have to trust us and Phyllis to do this. Dietrich won't hurt her now, because he needs her for tonight. Please trust Phyllis

to help us with this plan. It could be the difference maker. And we need you to be at the store sometime just before 9:00 PM. We need you to transition at the store when Dietrich arrives, and not a moment sooner. Do you think you can control the werewolf enough to attack Dietrich? You might be our only hope of killing him."

"I don't know," answered Buck. "I've never been able to control it before, and if there is a way to control it, no one has figured it out yet. Your plan could be risky. My werewolf has a will and mind of its own, and it just overwhelms me and I lose control! It could attack Dietrich, or it could attack you instead, or even worse yet, hurt Phyllis!"

"We have no choice," replied Brian. "We have to take that risk, for Phyllis, for her life depends on you. She could be doomed otherwise if we don't at least try!"

"I'll be there just before my transitioning time then. You can count on it!" exclaimed Buck. "Just promise me that no matter what happens to me, you'll protect Phyllis at all costs. If I can't kill Dietrich, maybe I can distract him enough for you to escort her out of harm's way. And if I so much as try to turn on or attempt to attack Phyllis, then you do whatever it takes to stop me, too! I could never live with myself if my werewolf hurt her! Heck, I'd even rather see her become a vampire than for her die at my hands!"

"We promise. And see you in three hours," replied Carl, as he and Brian shook Buck's hand, wishing him good luck, before leaving his cabin with their small flashlights in hand and heading back out the trail and to their truck.

"Let's get to the store and see what Phyllis was able to pry from Dietrich," said Brian. "Dietrich should be gone by the time we get there."

"Let's hope he is anyways," replied Carl. "But just in case he's not, I have both our rifles loaded to the max if we need them. If it works out somehow that bullets don't kill him, we'll at least give him a bad case of lead poisoning. And if he kills us instead, then it will have to be Buck's responsibility to stop him tonight."

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CHAPTER 10

6:00 PM

Dietrich walked into the store, locked the door behind him, and turned off the neon-lighted sign as he proceeded to walk over to the counter, where Phyllis was waiting. “I heard that you’ve had a willing change of heart,” he said. “This better not be some crazy game that you’re trying to play with me, Phyllis. But, then again, what difference would it make? No one can stop me from accomplishing my mission.”

“It’s no game, I swear,” answered Phyllis. “I will willingly go away with you, but first, I want to ask of you a favor that I hope you will give to me.” 1 m listening.

“Please don’t turn me into a vampire here in Circa, where I will have to feed on the blood of my friends. But instead, take me away from this place and turn me in a different location, and let my first drink of blood be from an animal, not a human.”

“Phyllis, Phyllis, Phyllis, you’re a girl who always thinks of her friends and others before yourself,” answered Dietrich. “You’re an amazing human woman, Phyllis! You’ll make a fantastic mate and vampire, who will, in time, think much differently about your human friends. Very well then, I will grant you your wish.”

“Thank you!” responded Phyllis with relief. “Dietrich, would you mind if I ask you some questions about my future in the vampire life and my new life with you? I would like to begin preparing myself psychologically to be a good mate for you, and would like to know what the vampire life will be like for me.” She was playing her spy role perfectly, as she seemed to be enticing Dietrich into trusting her, which was also made easier because of his arrogance.

“Excellent!” answered Dietrich. “I will answer those questions that I think are suitable, and I don’t have much else to do at this time or before 9:00 PM anyhow.”

“How will you change me? Will I have to die first and come back from the dead, like what happens in some of the vampire movies? And what can I expect from my early days of being a vampire?” asked Phyllis.

“Believe me, Phyllis, when I tell you that it will be very painless for you, as I’ll only need to puncture your skin and veins with my fangs, which will transfer my fast-acting curse to you when my saliva enters your bloodstream. You will immediately fade into unconsciousness for five or more minutes after, when the curse overwhelms your white blood cells and completely changes and enhances your DNA, but you won’t die. Upon awakening, you will no longer be human, nor ever again, but will instead be an ageless vampire with instant supernatural powers, like enhanced speed, strength, senses, and even unnatural healing abilities. But you will have up to thirty-six hours to drink your first blood, or you’ll weaken, feel ill, and die,” Dietrich explained.

“I can die when I’m a vampire?” she asked him.

“There are a few ways that a vampire could die, but your first immediate and most serious threat is if you are unable to acquire a blood supply to feed upon,” answered Dietrich. “But trust me, that should not be a concern for you, for I will have blood waiting for you. Drinking blood will keep you alive, supernaturally strong, and nourish you, allowing you to also retain your youthful appearance and beauty for as many centuries as you roam the Earth! The more blood that you drink, the longer it will remain in your system or body before requiring more blood to feed upon again, and the more years that pass you by as a vampire, the stronger you will become.”

Phyllis thought briefly about how lonely and cruel a life that would be for her if she had to outlive her family and friends for hundreds of years, while also enduring a cold and brutal lifestyle that relied upon the blood of innocent victims for her survival. It sounded repulsive, and would be torture for her, and she was determined to accept death over the vampire life. She forced another fake smile on her face and continued to ask Dietrich more questions. “What about going out in the sunlight? Will I still be able to enjoy the sun, as you can?”

“I’m afraid, my poor Phyllis, that only I can go out in the sunlight, because of my superior supernatural genetics, age, and unlimited power. Even so, I still don’t enjoy the sunlight. You, on the other hand, will only be able to go out at night, or you’ll quickly burn up. An important reason as to why I need to remove you from Alaska before its endless summer daylight arrives! Even I require much more blood in the summer than normal, to aid in defeating the sun’s power over us. As you age over the centuries, you’ll become more powerful and will eventually adapt to sunlight, but for your first hundred years, stay indoors! Oh, and there is also one last problem that you will encounter as a vampire, and will find very annoying,” said Dietrich. “You will not be able to enter into any house, or even an empty building, unless it is abandoned and been in existence for a period of at least a hundred years, or without first being invited in, which is why I had to ask you for permission to enter the store upon my first arrival.”

That statement from Dietrich sealed it for Phyllis in her mind. She knew for sure that she would put a gun to her head and kill herself if he couldn’t be stopped, rather than live a life in darkness, unable to feel the sun’s warmth on her face again. And if only she had known at that time not to invite Dietrich into the store, Ron might still be alive. “I remember back in August hearing of a teen girl from Hublick who was found dead, drained of all her blood,” she said. “Did you kill her?”

“An unfortunate victim who happened to wander in the wrong place at the wrong time,” answered Dietrich. “She was easy to spot with a full moon out that night. I was actually after a rather large wolf on that night to feed upon instead, and just had begun to secure it and penetrate its lower back with my fangs, but the wolf somehow managed to free itself from my grasp when it caught me by surprise, after it turned and bit me in the face at the same time that I clumsily slipped on some loose rocks, or else it would have never escaped.”

Phyllis gasped. She now knew that Dietrich was unknowingly responsible for Buck’s werewolf.

“No human or animal has ever escaped me before that night, and when the

wolf escaped, I gladly fed on that girl instead, drinking all of her blood, which quickly killed her!" exclaimed Dietrich. "I'd much prefer to feed on humans over animals, as human blood is far more satisfying and replenishing, supplying vampires with much more power. But feeding on too many humans in certain areas attracts too much unwanted attention from your so-called police."

"Is that why you live near the villages, to hideout better?" asked Phyllis.

"Now you're beginning to understand," Dietrich said. "If a human body is found dead and drained of blood near Fairville, or in a large city like Anchor town, every detective or federal agent in the state will be investigating them, even with the death of the homeless humans who live on the street. An unfortunate problem in today's world, with all its technology, making killing humans much more difficult than a century ago! But I, instead, move from village to village in remote places, intending to keep a low profile by feeding on animals or humans, who can be easily dumped into a river like the Yukon and made to disappear. The police don't seem to care as much about missing person reports from the villages, leaving me with more freedom to roam and feed at will."

"You've been so helpful to me in answering these questions," replied the disgusted Phyllis, while trying to force a fake and fractured smile. "If I can just ask a few more questions, I'll feel satisfied. Why do you need a full moon in order to change me into a vampire?"

"My twin brother Titus and I were born on the night of a full moon, and we also became the very first vampires, two years later, on the night of a full moon, so neither he nor I can create new vampire life without the full moon's rays," Dietrich replied. "If I tried to transform you without the full moon, you would remain human for my bite and saliva would have no supernatural power to create new vampire life."

"You have a twin brother?" asked the stunned Phyllis. "Oh please, can you tell me your story and how you came to be, and how old you are? Do you have a mother and father? I have to know!"

"You are so full of life and vigor, Phyllis! So many questions being asked by you, which surprises me to some extent. I will tell you the story, but then I must leave for a short time and search for animal blood to drink and strengthen myself with before 9:00 PM. When I complete your transition into a vampire, the process will weaken me somewhat and rob me of some vitality."

Phyllis made a mental note to herself of Dietrich's most recent revelation, storing it away in her memory, that he would become weakened soon after turning her, possibly making him the most vulnerable to an attack during that time.

"Titus and I were born in Israel, at around 1,000 BC, making our ages approximately 3,000 years," said Dietrich.

"Oh my goodness," gasped Phyllis in stunned amazement. "That sounds like somewhere around the time of the Old Testament."

"Or, as you might have heard about when you were a child, the time of David and Goliath," Dietrich confirmed.

Phyllis nearly passed out when she heard his age, feeling overwhelmed and unable to comprehend the length of time that he had been wandering the Earth, but she quickly gathered herself. "Please continue," she said, dazed but wanting to

hear more.

“Our mother was a harlot for the Philistine army and our father was the ten-foot tall giant whom you have heard of as Goliath of Gath, the so-called champion of the Philistine army!” said Dietrich.

“Goliath was your father? Are you serious? Gath?” asked Phyllis with a look of surprise on her face.

“Gath was one of five royal cities in Israel during that time period, which was under the control of the Philistines,” he went on to say. “When our mother realized that she had life in her womb and would no longer be of use to the Philistine army, she fled, fearing for her life, and went into hiding, where she raised us for two years. After our births on a full moon night, our harlot mother soon figured out very quickly that we weren’t normal babies. Titus was the firstborn, and had six fingers and toes, as did our father, but I was more normal in appearance, born thirty minutes after. We were both far stronger, aggressive, and more dangerous than normal for two-year-old children, with Titus being slightly stronger than myself, but both of us apparently inheriting our father’s DNA and genes from the pit of Hell! Titus was even strong enough to kill the neighbor’s pet dog with several blows at two years old.”

Phyllis could hardly believe what she was hearing, but was so intrigued by his story that she wanted to hear more, despite how evil and dangerous Dietrich was.

He continued on with telling Phyllis about his youth and history. “When we were two and half years old, our father, Goliath, came across our mother by chance and killed her in a fit of rage, breaking her neck after he learned about us, and for her fleeing two years earlier. Goliath’s rage didn’t end there, as he abducted Titus and me, dumping and abandoning us into a wilderness cave to die a slow death.”

Phyllis was horrified and even began to pity Dietrich when she heard of his brutal childhood.

“But instead of us dying as our father had thought or wanted, we became supernatural beings that first night in the cave, a night of a full moon, when we were bitten multiple times by the vampire bats inhabiting the cave. The infected and diseased saliva from the bats mixed perfectly with our inherited Hell’s genes, turning us into the very first species of our kind, vampires!” said Dietrich.

“Wow!” responded Phyllis. “What do you mean by saying that ‘Hell’s genes’ or ‘genes from the pit of Hell’ as the possible reason why you both could only be changed into vampires and no one else?”

“Titus and I never knew who our grandfather was, but we both speculated that Goliath’s father was a fallen angel, kicked out from Heaven based on rumors and hearsay during that time period, which is only pure speculation from us, but made sense to us, given our father’s enormous size and our supernatural abilities.”

“Please continue,” said the intrigued Phyllis.

“Even though we were only two and a half years of age, we were now vampires with supernatural power and speed, enough speed to catch the rats, snakes, and bats of the cave, making their blood our food supply instead. Their blood enhanced our power and abilities twofold, which also helped us age to adulthood in just three weeks, ranking us as the top predator on the food chain.”

“Are you saying that you grew to an adult in three weeks, from two and a half years old to looking like you’re thirty years old just from feeding on animal blood?” asked Phyllis with shock.

“That is quite correct, but after we rapidly grew to adulthood, we had to leave the cave for larger blood sources, like humans and cattle or sheep,” answered Dietrich.

“How were you able to learn languages?” she asked him. “Did you have to take schooling to learn them?”

“Titus and I are able to instantly learn what humans know by merely drinking their bodies completely dry of their blood,” Dietrich explained. “The very first human we fed on and killed was a teacher, and by doing so, we learned what she knew, both her language and everything about her life. The human blood was euphoric for both of us, as it will also be for you, much more than with animal blood, and we then knew, after we killed her, where her family and students were, which also allowed us to stalk them, hunt them down, and kill them.”

Phyllis was now very concerned if Dietrich had learned about Buck after drinking Ron’s blood. “What did you learn from Ron when you drank his blood?” she asked with concern.

“If you remember, I didn’t drink all of his blood, only five seconds’ worth,” he answered with a small, sinister chuckle. “Whatever minute pieces from his memory that I caught was only about you. I got the sense that he loved you!”

Phyllis felt disgusted with Dietrich and hated him, but knew she needed to learn more if she could. “Please, do you have any more information to your very interesting story?”

“Titus and I stayed together for five years after becoming vampires, hunting and killing humans, until the Israeli army came to learn of our existence and began searching for us while trying unsuccessfully to kill us! We decided that the best action to take at that time, which would help hide our existence and preserve our species, was to separate from each other. Since that time, Titus has roamed and hunted humans in the Eastern Hemisphere, while I migrated to, and have mostly roamed and hunted humans, in the Western Hemisphere. Although Titus and I are thousands of miles apart, because we are supernatural twins, we still have a connection, a bond, with each other and will forever be interlinked.”

“What did you just say?” asked Phyllis with alarm. “Titus and you are interlinked?”

“If something were to happen to one of us, the other brother would feel and know it within twenty-four hours, even sensing each other’s locations,” he replied.

This was devastating news for Phyllis, as she now just learned that if they were able to kill Dietrich, Titus would soon realize it and possibly retaliate. “You just stated that if something happened to you, Titus would know. What could happen to you?” she cleverly asked Dietrich. “What will happen to me if you turn me into a vampire and you died, if that’s possible?” This was the moment of the conversation that Phyllis had been working so hard to achieve. She would finally be able to possibly learn from him of his fatal flaw, for both him and possibly Titus also.

“If I were to die, Titus would most likely send some of his vampire minions

over to force you into joining with him on his side of the continent," he answered.

"Minions?" she asked. "Titus has minions?"

"Minions are vampires who were created by Titus or me, and who are in servitude to us, much like you will become tonight. Titus doesn't like the thought of new vampires, especially recently turned vampires, roaming free and on their own, without restrictions or guidance, and neither do I, which is one reason why I haven't had my own minions in fifty years. New vampires who are left unattended are as a ship without a rudder, and could create far too much risk in exposing our existence, especially if bloodthirsty, impulsive, careless, or reckless vampires were allowed to do as they please, or kill as much as they wanted, without realizing the possible ramifications. Titus would have you killed if you were out of control or unwilling to join as one of his minions. And as far as my fatality is concerned..." Dietrich didn't have a chance to finish his sentence, the most important information that Phyllis needed, because a vehicle drove slowly into the parking lot of the store and parked near the old wood shed, on the far end of the lot. "Those two again!" the vampire said with an angry tone. "Why are they here? I warned him not to interfere, and now my patience has worn thin!"

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CHAPTER 11

7:00 PM

"I think that I'll go outside and have a chat with your two friends, and since they're here, I won't need to search for animal blood now. I'll drink the blood of Brian instead, kill him, and then save his friend for you to drink and kill tonight," declared the furious Dietrich.

Phyllis protested vehemently to Dietrich, trying to persuade him not to hurt Brian and Carl. "You promised that you wouldn't hurt anyone if I stayed in the store, and I've stayed here, as you demanded. Please don't harm them!" she begged.

"I changed my mind!" replied Dietrich as he turned toward the door.

Phyllis felt that she was now out of options, and being desperate to spare Carl and Brian from Ron's earlier fate, she quickly pulled her Taser c2 model from her purse and fired 50,000 volts into Dietrich's back before he made it to the door. Dietrich stopped immediately, but appeared to be unaffected by the voltage.

He turned to glare at Phyllis with a look of anger and disappointment on his face. "You little cunning deceiver!" he said to her with wrath. "You're displaying vampire behavior already," he added as he proceeded to cut the Taser wires in half with his long, black, razor-sharp talon, which grew from his index finger in mere seconds. "Do not force me to change my mind and kill you, instead of turning you tonight."

"I'd rather die anyways than to live that miserable life with you that you described!" she replied. She reached under the counter and pulled out a .38 special revolver that she brought down from upstairs, just before he arrived, and raised its barrel to her right temple in a self-threatening manner. "I have no choice anymore but to choose death if you try to harm them and turn me tonight!"

Phyllis barely blinked before Dietrich was behind her in an instant, removing the gun from her hand and snapping the gun's handle off with a mere push of his thumb. She was caught completely off guard by the supernatural speed with which he moved. "I have two hours left before I can transform you, and I will not get this close and have you ruin my plans by killing yourself!" exclaimed the furious Dietrich. He lifted Phyllis up as she gasped by placing his left arm around her, and under her left arm, and instantaneously whisked her upstairs, after also grabbing some rope off the store's shelf during the process.

"What are you doing?" asked the frightened Phyllis as Dietrich threw her face down on a cot in an upstairs room and tied her wrist together behind her back, followed quickly by tying her feet together, as she struggled to resist, albeit in vain.

"You stay here like a good little girl, and I'll be back for you in two hours," he told her as he also placed a small cloth towel in her mouth to gag her with. "Now,

I will go outside to have a chat with your two friends!" he exclaimed, her muffled pleas through her gag going unheard.

Carl and Brian had been parked outside the store and near the wood shed for five minutes, eyeing the front door, under its large, overhead nighttime security floodlight, thinking that it might be safe to go inside and talk to Phyllis, as they speculated that Dietrich had already gone. They opened the truck doors, and Carl walked around the rear of the truck, to Brian's passenger side, wanting to take a peek inside the wood shed, which stood to their right, and curious of its contents, when they suddenly heard the chimes on the store's front door jingle, and out of the store walked Dietrich, toward them, with an angry, inauspicious look on his face.

"Uh oh," muttered Carl with fright, as he and Brian quickly opened the passenger door, grabbed their rifles, and pointed them toward Dietrich.

"Didn't we recently go through a scenario like this with Buck's werewolf already?" mumbled Brian to Carl.

"You'd think once in two days would be more than enough," answered Carl.

"Gentlemen, I am so glad that you two dropped by at this time," said Dietrich to them with scorn, while advancing toward them slowly, but in a bullying, intimidating fashion. "I thought I instructed you not to interfere," he said in a scolding tone while gazing at Brian with disdain.

"Don't come any closer, or we'll shoot the Hell out of you!" demanded Carl to Dietrich, who was advancing from twenty yards away.

"Is that so?" responded the unwavering Dietrich in a cold, agitated tone. "I've been wandering this planet for 3,000 years, and I've been hunted by soldiers and hunters from almost every continent, who were far more respectable than you two imbeciles! From every century since I came to be, I've eluded Israeli and Roman armies, warlords and their warriors, samurai, ninja, cannibals, headhunters, even your so-called modern-day commandos, and the Mexican cartel drug lords have tried and failed to kill me!" he added in an arrogant and scornful tone. "But if you two think you have a chance of killing me, then go ahead and shoot me!" he said, mocking them. "But please know that when your rifles are empty, I will personally rip the heart out of your chest, Brian, and leave it along with the rest of your flesh and body for the ravens to feed upon, just after I've finished drinking your blood, and Carl will have both his legs broken by me, so he'll be unable to flee, and will still be here for the newly transformed Phyllis to feed upon in under two hours from now!"

Carl and Brian looked at each other, having a serious look upon their faces, as if this were about to be their last hurrah and sight of each other, in a supposed last stand and futile attempt to shoot and kill him.

"I feel like I'm about to puke," said Brian to Carl, feeling nauseated and doomed after learning of his death sentence.

"Oh, what the Hell?" said Carl. "Shoot!"

The two of them leveled their rifle's telescopic sights onto the center of Dietrich's chest and heart area, and opened fire, rapidly working the bolt actions on their rifles as they fired, ejecting the empty brass and firing again after speedily chambering another bullet so quickly that the discharge sounds from their rifles

sounded as if semiautomatic weapons were being fired! KABOOM.OOM.OOM.OOM.BOOM.OOM.OOM.OOM.OOM. KABOOM, roared the sounds from both rifles combined, echoing off into the surrounding forest and village. Dietrich managed to elude the first two bullets from their first two shots, after moving sideways in a lightning-quick blur, but was hit with their last eight shots, as his body reacted with repetitive, involuntary jerking movements when the bullets penetrated his upper body like a piñata, which finally knocked him over backward, where he landed flat on his back on the snowy ground at their last two shots.

Brian and Carl stood motionless while the smell of the gun smoke cleared from the cool night air, and the last distant echo from their last fired gunshots drew silent, as they gazed at Dietrich's lifeless and horizontal body, which lay face up.

"Do you think he's dead?" asked Carl with a glimmer of hope. "I better go stab him through the heart with this wooden stake that I made earlier, just to be on the safe side," he added as he pulled out a twelve-inch long wooden stake with a sharp, pointed end from inside his jacket pocket. "I carved out four of them."

"Nice carving job," replied Brian. "But be careful! He could be playing possum."

"No, gentlemen, I am not dead, but still very much alive," responded the furious Dietrich as he quickly stood back up, brushed the snow off the back of his pants and jacket, and continued his previous advancement toward them, but at a faster pace, so as to not allow them a chance to reload their rifles. "And you wasted your time carving those wooden stakes, for they will have no effect on me and will be useless! You've made me really upset now for putting bullet holes into my nice sport jacket," he exclaimed with sarcasm and disdain as he continually advanced forward, while digging his right fingers into his bullet wounds, retrieving and pulling out the mushroomed lead, and tossing them to the ground as his mortal bullet wounds began to rapidly heal, as if he were never shot at all. "Do tell, where am I going to find a new sport jacket in this village? My bullet wounds have nearly vanished, but the holes in my expensive jacket will not supernaturally heal."

"I'd be happy to buy you a new one, but am afraid that I'll need a rain check," answered Brian in a desperate attempt to humor himself before his death, now just mere seconds away.

Dietrich was closing in quickly and just five yards away, moving past the front of the truck, forcing Brian and Carl to stumble backward through the man-sized, hollow door frame, and inside of the dark wood shed, until they were trapped inside and backed up against a row of firewood stacked along the back wall, unable to move any further. Dietrich could have closed the distance in a split second and quickly killed them if he desired, but seemed to enjoy his slow, methodical, and more intimidating advancement, like a cat stalking a mouse, which had proven to strike much more terror into his victim's hearts, often paralyzing them with fear. Dietrich was now at the edge of the shed's door, with Carl and Brian just inside and barely out of arm's reach, when he suddenly stopped to gaze at them.

"Um, not that I'm complaining, but why did you just stop?" asked the petrified Carl to Dietrich.

“Why don’t you two step back outside for a moment and die like real men, instead of hiding inside a shed and dying like cowards?” he answered in deceptive fashion.

“Why should that make a difference to you?” asked the perplexed Brian. “I’m kind of surprised you stopped and haven’t killed us already. If you intend to kill us, just hurry up and do it, and spare us the bull crap drama!”

“Wait just a minute,” responded Carl, as if he just thought of something brilliant. “It’s a hunch, but I’m willing to bet that you can’t come into this shed, or any shed, without first being invited in, am I correct? I don’t know anything about vampires, other than in the movies, where a vampire always has to be first invited in, but it has to be the only explanation as to why we’re not dead yet,” added Carl while pointing his right index finger at Dietrich.

Dietrich began clapping his hands together as if to applaud him. “It appears that you’re not as mentally deficient as I thought,” he exclaimed. “Invite me in and I’ll end you both quickly and painlessly, or else, you can choose to hide in this shed until 9:00 PM, slowly fighting off the cold and dying most miserably later, when I force your hypothermic bodies out with fire into the waiting fangs of Phyllis and me. The choice is yours!”

“We’ll go with your second choice,” answered Carl, feeling a little cocky, as if Brian and he had just achieved a small morale victory over Dietrich.

“Very well then!” responded the angry Dietrich. “And just to make sure that you two don’t try and drive off in your truck...” He reached down with both of his hands, placing them underneath the cab of Carl’s half-ton truck, and rapidly lifted it up with the simplest of ease, tipping the truck over and onto its left side. “You two should also know that I have Phyllis restrained upstairs, unable to move, and helplessly awaiting my return at 9:00 PM, when I will gladly sink my fangs into her neck and change her into a vampire. Leave this shed to help her at your own peril, for I will be nearby, and I have exceptional hearing! If I so much as hear your footsteps walking out of this shed, I’ll return in a hurry and with a vengeance to finish what I originally intended to do.” Then he disappeared into the night.

“We have to help Phyllis and find out what she learned,” exclaimed Brian.

“My truck!” moaned the discouraged Carl. “He ruined my truck!”

“Forget about your truck,” replied Brian. “Insurance can pay for the damages. We need to get to Phyllis!”

“And will insurance pay for our bodies, too, when he hears us walking outside and leaving here, and instantly returns to break my legs and rip your heart out of your chest?” asked Carl with sarcasm.

“I’m hoping that he was bluffing,” answered Brian. “He could have just waited us out, or forced us out somehow, but for some reason, he felt the need to leave, not wanting to expend the extra energy on us right now. I’m guessing that he had to go search for another blood source and replenish himself.”

“I don’t try to get into the mind of psycho vampires,” quipped Carl, “maybe he’s taunting us, but if you happen to be right, he could be far away from here by now, in search of an animal. I vote that we go for it also! But first, I want to climb down into my truck and grab the rest of our ammo, not that it will do much good anyways. We should have two boxes left.”

“How are we supposed to kill that deranged freak when our bullets have no effect on him?” asked Brian with concern. “I sure hope Phyllis has some encouraging news.”

“Maybe Buck can kill him,” hoped Carl. “And even though our bullets didn’t kill Dietrich, at least they knocked him down, and possibly weakened him some. We need to try and shoot him again, just before Buck does his thing, and hopefully, it weakens and distracts him enough for Buck to sneak in and finish him. I just hope that Buck’s werewolf doesn’t lose all control and kill the rest of us at the same time!”

“Right now, I can’t think of any better idea, so we better make our move now if we’re going to do it,” replied Brian. “My wristwatch says its 7:45 PM now, which doesn’t leave us much time to get our answers. I’ll stay here in the shed and keep an eye out for Dietrich while you climb down into the truck for the rest of the ammo. If Dietrich shows up unexpectedly again, you can try to hold him off with your rifle while I make a mad dash for Phyllis.”

“My hero”, replied Carl jokingly

The two of them quickly glanced up into the sky and noticed that the stars were becoming brighter, and the lightened, rounded moon was inching its way up, higher and higher, meaning the time of reckoning was almost upon them.

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CHAPTER 12

7:45 PM

Carl poked his head out of the shed's rough, door-less entry, and carefully looked to his right and then to his left for any sign of Dietrich's presence. "Seems to look clear," he whispered. He left his empty rifle in the shed with Brian as he quietly inched his way out of the shed door, and began taking baby steps toward his truck, which lay on its left side just five yards away. His heart began to pound rapidly through his chest from adrenaline, as he wondered if each step he took toward his truck would be his last. Either he was about to have his legs broken by Dietrich or he would be killed instead. Just then, snow slid off the metal shed roof, making a loud thump as it hit the ground, nearly giving both Carl and Brian a heart attack! Carl breathed a sigh of relief, and then slowly continued his walk of bravery. Moments later, he finally placed his hands on his truck, took one last look around, and, after seeing no sign of Dietrich, began climbing his way up the underside of his truck and toward the passenger door, when it seemed safe to do so. He placed his left leg on the drive shaft and hoisted his 250-pound frame up, grabbing onto one of the exhaust pipes with his right hand, making him feel like a mountain climber who was scaling a rocky ledge.

So far so good, especially for a big guy like me, Carl thought to himself as he continued climbing, and glad that Brian's theory about Dietrich seemed correct thus far. He finally managed to stretch his right arm up high enough to squeeze the handle of the passenger door with his hand. He lifted up on the handle and, having some good strength of his own, managed to pull the door open enough as to slide his left hand inside the opening, and lift the door up and completely open.

Brian felt some relief of his own from down below, when he watched Carl safely lower himself down into the truck through the opened passenger-side door.

"Found one of them!" Carl mumbled to himself as he noticed one box of ammo lying flat on the window of the driver's door, and reached down to grab them while desperately looking for the other box. The box felt lighter than normal, and was found to only have ten rounds left inside when Carl opened the box to inspect it.

"Carl!" shouted Brian loudly, and with some urgency.

Carl heard Brian's voice but could not see him, as the front of his truck and windshield were facing toward the front of the store. But Carl's heart sank, as he could now see through his windshield the reason why Brian had warned him. Standing ten yards away and facing in his direction was a dark silhouette of a man, in the shadows and with the store's floodlight at his back, who appeared to be wiping dried blood from around his mouth with a handkerchief after having just previously sprinkled snow on it for moisture. It was Dietrich.

"Gentlemen, did I not say that I would be nearby?" asked Dietrich as he began walking toward the truck, with Carl trapped inside. "I must say that I'm a little

disappointed in both of you, and that you're not inside the store, trying to save Phyllis, as I would have assumed. Instead, one of you would rather cower in the shed for safety while the other values the contents of the inside of his vehicle as more important than her." He was mocking them.

"Sorry that we disappointed you," exclaimed Brian to Dietrich, trying to mock him in return, while also hoping to draw his attention away from Carl.

Dietrich stopped five yards from the front of the truck, bent over to scoop up a large handful of sticky snow, and began packing it together, tightly and firmly, into a round ball, which was hard as a baseball when he finished. "Did you know that when I hunt for animal blood in the wintertime, I often find it an unnecessary waste of energy when attempting to chase after them in the deep snow?" he said as he continually kept packing away at the snowball, making it larger and even harder. "But instead, I find it much more effective to design a weapon, like this mere snowball. When packed hard enough, and thrown by me, it has a speed in excess of 300 mph and killing power of up to a distance of 200 yards."

"Urn, what?" asked Brian aloud.

This can't be good, thought Carl to himself while watching him from behind the windshield.

Dietrich finished packing the snowball and cocked his right arm back in a rearward motion, like a baseball pitcher preparing to deliver a 90 mph fast-ball, and let it fly like a blur into the windshield, shattering the glass with an explosion that pelted Carl with extreme force, giving him several cuts and abrasions to his face. "What did I tell you just before I left you here, Carl?" he asked, taunting them while walking slowly to the flipped truck. "Oh, yes, now I remember! I was going to break your legs, wasn't I?"

Carl tried desperately to find an escape, pressing himself hard against the rear of the seat. But the only way out was through the broken windshield and toward Dietrich, who had just stopped in front of the truck, or climb back up and out the passenger door.

"Over here, you dumb ass!" shouted Brian from inside the shed, in a desperate attempt to draw Dietrich's ire to him and away from Carl.

"Before I break your legs, let me take your truck for a quick spin," exclaimed Dietrich as he pushed on the hood of Carl's truck, which lay on its side, and spun the vehicle around 180 degrees, leaving it facing the shed and Brian, who was standing just inside the shed door.

Carl, in quick reaction, managed to toss the ammo out through the shattered windshield and into the waiting hands of Brian before Dietrich pushed on the rear of the truck, spinning him around again another 180 degrees, and back to the truck's original position. Brian began to load the clips of both rifles while Dietrich seemed to be playing a sadistic game with Carl, spinning his truck around, over and over several times, with him still trapped inside. Carl was becoming nauseous, as if he were in a tortuous carnival ride, from being spun around so much while inside his truck.

"Hurry up and shoot! I'm getting sick!" shouted Carl to Brian, just as the front of his truck was spun around half circle again, and now facing Brian. KABOOM! The sound of Brian's rifle shot was music to Carl's ears, as it ceased the spinning

and torment when the bullet smacked Dietrich in the forehead, causing a distraction just long enough to enable the quick-thinking Carl to jump out through the broken windshield and into the safety of the shed again.

Dietrich became enraged as he shook his head from the annoying pain of the bullet.

“Shoot again!” shouted Carl.

“This is the only ammo we have left!” replied Brian. “I think we should save the rest of it for our last you know what!”

Dietrich was furious, and his face turned back into the terrifying vampire-looking horror show, which he displayed when killing Ron earlier in the afternoon. But it was the first sight for Brian and Carl, and they felt horrified when they saw the pointed ears, pale-white face, yellow eyes, fangs, and talons. Dietrich put his right hand onto the closed tailgate of Carl’s truck and shoved it hard, pushing and sliding it on the ground five yards, and wedging its grille and front bumper into the doorway of the shed, trapping them both inside with no escape route.

“I wonder what he’s up to now,” Brian told Carl and himself No sooner had he finished with his question when one of Dietrich’s 300 mph packed snowballs came flying through the side of the shed wall, followed by another and another.

“Hit the deck!” shouted Carl as he and Brian dove onto their stomachs in search of cover and safety from the flying projectiles. The furious Dietrich was outside, packing snowballs together with rapid speed and power, and firing them through the shed in the same manner that he broke the windshield with.

“Look out!” shouted Brian as another snowball penetrated through the wall and collided with the stacked woodpile with such force that it knocked half of the top row off and onto the ground. He was observing the side of the shed wall and the dim light from the outside, shining through the dozens of holes that Dietrich had put into the wall, when he noticed an axe leaning up against the woodpile. He didn’t have a second to think about a use for the axe as a weapon when two more snowballs flew over them in a blur, nearly grazing their backs.

“Crap!” exclaimed Carl. “That one was close! Look at the wall! It looks like it got shot up with several semiautomatic shotguns!” Another snowball flew in and hit the top of the woodpile, knocking some firewood from the top row and onto their backs.

“Damn!” shouted Carl. “That hurt!”

Carl and Brian were on the verge of begging Dietrich for mercy when his attack and barrage of snowball missiles ceased. They were both also beginning to feel chilled and cold, and now were in possible danger of having mild hypothermia from being outside and in the shed for over an hour.

“Gentlemen, I guess my fun has to cease temporarily as it is now 8:50 PM, according to my wristwatch. It is time for me to prepare Phyllis for her new life,” said Dietrich with scorn. “Time flies when I’m having fun, but the moon is brighter and nearly at full power, and my eternal companion waits!”

Just when Dietrich turned and began to walk toward the store, he noticed a shadowy figure of a man who was walking out of the darkness from the far end of the lot, and entering into the radius of the store’s floodlight. He appeared as if he

were ill, bending over and holding his lower abdominal area as he walked. It was Buck, and he was in the early stages of his transition period.

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CHAPTER 13

8:50 PM

"Stay away from Phyllis, you deranged psycho!" shouted the emotionally charged and angry Buck at Dietrich, stumbling and staggering toward the vampire while cramping and sweating profusely. "If you touch her, you'll pay with your pathetic life!"

"Indeed?" responded Dietrich, seeming more annoyed than angry by Buck's threat. "And who are you supposed to be that I should take your threats seriously, sick man? In the words that my father once spoke, 'Am I a dog?'" he added as to mock him with disdain.

"No, I'm the dog!" answered Buck. "A very nasty dog who will rip you to shreds in ten minutes!"

"Ten minutes? I would be very amused to see how you would attempt to rip me to shreds, but I don't have time for this nonsense, and you'll be dead before then!" exclaimed Dietrich angrily as he raised his left hand over his right shoulder and backhanded Buck across the face with such extreme force that it propelled him twenty yards through the air, knocking him unconscious when he collided into the rooftop of Carl's truck and tumbled to the ground, landing on his back just in front of the shed. The temporary blackout seemed to also briefly hinder his transition into the werewolf, and had Dietrich convinced that he was dead. "I'll let Phyllis feed on the blood of your dead body, sick man!" the vampire mumbled to himself as he continued into the store and up the stairs toward Phyllis.

"Buck? Buck? Are you okay?" asked Brian with a muffled voice from inside the shed.

"Buck!" shouted Carl, hoping that Buck wasn't dead.

Carl and Brian both shouted at Buck a few more times when they started to hear his groans.

"I feel like my face got hit by a Mack truck," mumbled Buck as he slowly regained his consciousness and stumbled back to his feet. "I see this isn't going to be easy!"

"Are you okay?" asked Brian.

"I'll be fine," answered Buck. "I have rapid healing whenever I get hurt, like after you two shot me. But stage one of my transitioning has already begun." No sooner had he regained all his senses and memory when he remembered why he was there. "Phyllis!" he exclaimed. "I need to save her!"

"Wait, Buck!" replied Carl with anxiousness. "You're not ready yet!"

"Agreed!" said Brian also. "If you go now, you will either get yourself killed before transitioning or injure Phyllis after your transition."

"What in the hell am I supposed to do then?" asked Buck with a feeling of anxiety. "I can't let him turn her!"

“If you move the truck and let us out, we’ll go help her and try to lure him out of the store,” replied Brian.

Buck fell to his knees, moaning in pain and clutching his stomach as his werewolf transition entered stage two. “I can’t,” he replied with sorrow.

“Come again?” asked Carl.

“As much as I want you two to help her, I’m too close now. The full moon is minutes away and I can feel its power! Trust me, you’ll be much safer from my werewolf if you stay trapped in there for now,” answered Buck in a deeper, throaty voice, as his pain became increasingly greater, while also feeling helpless and disheartened at not being able to help Phyllis.

“It sounds very painful when you transition,” said Brian to Buck through the wall of the shed.

“When it first happened, it was unbearable!” screamed Buck as he struggled to speak from the violent muscle spasms he was experiencing. “Believe it or not, my transition takes less time and becomes less painful each month, as if I’m becoming immune to it!”

“Get that axe that’s leaning on the woodpile, Carl. We’ll chop our way out through the shed wall,” said Brian.

“Great idea!” replied Carl. “I’d rather go down fighting and trying to help, instead of being sheltered in here. Besides, Dietrich will eventually kill us anyways, if we don’t freeze to death first!”

8:58 PM

Dietrich entered the room where he left Phyllis restrained, only to find her in the corner of the room, attempting to cut her ropes with a pair of scissors that she had knocked off a desk and onto the floor by kicking the desk with her feet.

“Why are you trying to fight this, Phyllis?” asked Dietrich. “This will only take a minute, and when I’m finished, you’ll be far superior to who you are now, and will soon thank me instead of resisting me!” He picked her up off the floor and placed her back on the cot, in a sitting position, while she helplessly struggled, kicked, and resisted in any way that she could, along with muffled protests and teary-eyed pleas for mercy through her gag.

Phyllis felt despondent at realizing her fate, and being unable to stop Dietrich from cursing her with the most horrible future life that she could ever imagine. Her memory flashed in an instant, with several thoughts of Buck, her family, and her friends, and thoughts of losing or possibly harming everyone she ever loved.

Dietrich sat behind her on the cot with his right hand around her waist and brushed her hair back with his left hand, as to expose the left side of her neck. “The time has come,” he told her as fangs protruded from his mouth and he gently bit her in the side of her neck, and into her veins, which infected her with his vampire curse. Phyllis’s body began several convulsions as she passed out and slumped down on the cot. The vampire removed the gag from her mouth and released her hands and feet from their binds, bending over to whisper in her ear. “When you awaken shortly, Phyllis, come outside and enjoy your first feast of blood, the blood of your friends. It’s my first gift for you.” He left her lying

unconscious on the cot as he left the room, and went back outside, intending to drive Carl and Brian out of the shed.

When Dietrich walked back outside, he was not prepared for what he saw. Buck was still alive and bent over from his muscle spasms, but his eyes were beginning to turn red, and his body size was increasing in hair, mass, and shape. Just then, Carl managed to smash a big enough hole through the shed wall for him and Brian to escape from.

“How can he still be alive?” asked the surprised Dietrich. “And what is happening to him?”

“You’re saying that you don’t know about him, and you’ve never seen anything like this before?” Brian asked the vampire as Carl and he walked through their newly made hole in the shed wall and back outside, with their rifles in hand. “He’s your accidental creation!”

“What are you talking about?” Dietrich asked.

“That wolf that you bit and let escape near Hublick back in August became infected with your evil virus curse also, and then managed to travel south near Circa, biting and infecting him a few days later!” exclaimed Brian. “He has a werewolf curse, unknowingly made by you, and is possibly the first species of its kind!”

“Impossible!” responded Dietrich.

Buck was still a minute away from fully transforming, but he still left all of them in awe, as his bones were snapping and cracking loudly, and his shoes and clothes were shredding from his body being reshaped and sized to a more muscular and menacing, hulk-looking beast. His head was the last to change, as now his ears were becoming pointed like wolf ears, along with a snout protruding from the front of his face, loaded with lethal fangs. Drool and saliva dripped from its menacing jaws as it snapped at the air and rumbled low pitched growls! “Enough with this impressive freak show,” Dietrich said. “I don’t have time for charades, as I will correct my previous mistake and make sure he’s fully dead this time, and end this new species permanently!”

“Buck’s not quite ready yet, so let’s rock and roll, and do our thing!” said Carl with bravado.

They both raised their rifles in one final swan song and fired all their last remaining bullets into Dietrich’s chest and head, which temporarily weakened, staggered, and distracted him from Buck, but also furiously angered him again, as when they had previously shot him earlier. Dietrich began to transform his face into his terrifying vampire, but now Buck was fully transformed and at full strength and power. The werewolf howled a hideous shriek toward the moon, which sounded deafening at close range, before growling and leaping onto Dietrich from ten yards away, slamming him into the front wall of the store, which stunned and dazed the vampire. Dietrich lay on his back as the werewolf, straddled him, bit into and clamped down onto his right arm, tearing a chunk of vampire flesh out with its mouth and fangs, as it violently shook its head! It was the most pain that Dietrich had ever experienced, but the wound supernaturally healed and only further enraged him. He placed both his feet under the werewolf’s abdomen and kicked him off, sending him flying through the air and crashing into

Carl's truck.

"I wish I had a video camera and was recording this," quipped Carl. "This fight makes the thriller in Manila look like a fight between two kittens!" He and Brian felt helpless to assist Buck, as they were out of bullets and could only watch. He put his rifle down and grabbed the axe instead, for an emergency self-defense weapon, and one that he hoped he didn't need to use.

The werewolf had quickly recovered and swiped Dietrich across the face like a bear with its right paw and claws, raking his face and hurling him through the air and into the store wall again, after the vampire advanced on it. The werewolf was on top of Dietrich in an instant again, trying to bite into the throat of the vampire. Dietrich was holding its head and snapping jaws away from his throat, and managed to grab the werewolf by the neck hair with both of his hands, twisting and hurling it off to his right, slamming it into the ground with extreme force! Dietrich was quickly on his feet and pounced on the dazed werewolf, clamping his left hand around its throat, lifting it into the air, and cocking his right arm back in a rearward motion, in an attempt to thrust his hand into its chest and rip its heart out, when Phyllis walked out of the store, and her presence briefly distracted Dietrich.

"Your blood that you need to feed on awaits you over there, my Phyllis!" said Dietrich to her, pointing toward Carl and Brian as he turned to face them. Drain and kill them!

The distraction quickly gave the werewolf enough time to recover again, and proceeded to kick Dietrich off, while also ripping some big gashes into the chest and stomach of the vampire with its sharp, clawed feet. Dietrich smacked into the front store wall yet again and crash-landed at the feet of Phyllis, who was still standing in front of the door, but Dietrich quickly stood up, with his back toward her, and faced the growling and approaching werewolf.

"What are you waiting for, Phyllis? I command you to go kill them, now!" he shouted to her as he raked a deep wound of his own into the side of the werewolf with the sharp talons on his left fingers. Dietrich also attempted to gash slashes and wounds with his talons into the legs of the werewolf, hoping to cripple it, but his failed attempts were kept at bay by the snapping jaws and teeth of the werewolf.

Instead of attacking Carl and Brian, as Dietrich had ordered her, Phyllis leaped onto the back of Dietrich with supernatural speed, biting into the right side of his neck and drinking a portion of his blood,which also managed to further weaken him during the process the process. After a brief struggle, the shocked Dietrich managed to grab Phyllis off his back with his right hand and hurled her toward Carl and Brian, where she crash-landed near their feet.

"Impossible! How is it possible for you to break the power of my control, defy me, and turn against me?" said the stunned vampire.

Throwing Phyllis through the air seemed to somehow infuriate the werewolf, causing a fatal reaction for the vampire when it leaped onto Dietrich with blazing speed while also clamping its claws into his flesh for a superior and unbreakable grip, and bit into the throat and jugular of the weakened vampire as they both fell to the ground, with the werewolf landing on top. Phyllis stood up and looked at

Carl and Brian as they both slowly backed away from her, not knowing what to expect.

"It's okay guys," she told them. "Somehow, I'm under total control of my vampire personality, and not under Dietrich's control. And after I bit him and drank some of his blood, I also learned enough to know how to kill him now, as vampires can acquire valuable information from drinking blood. Give me the axe please." Carl handed the axe to her, and she smiled at them before turning to look for Dietrich.

The werewolf was still straddling Dietrich, and exhibiting rumbling type, victory growls while the vampire lay on the ground, mortally wounded, from the werewolf's last bite to his throat, a wound that wouldn't supernaturally and rapidly heal this time, because of his weakened condition and desperate need for more blood, a feat that Dietrich had neither expected nor experienced during his 3,000-year lifetime.

Phyllis cautiously approached the werewolf and spoke soft, gentle words to it while caressing it with her left hand. "It's okay, Buck, everything is okay. I'll finish him, and we'll soon be together."

The werewolf moved off the vampire and melted away into the nearby trees, to wait and watch.

"Can you believe what we just saw?" Carl asked Brian as they watched and observed from a safe distance. "Not only can Phyllis control her own vampire, but somehow, she can now control Buck's werewolf also."

"It's miraculous, and I don't have the answers, but if I were going to guess, it's as if the great love and virtue that she possesses in her heart were much too great for even an evil and powerful vampire curse to control," replied Brian. "It's something that even the 3,000-year-old Dietrich never took into consideration, or never thought possible, because of his own arrogance. And I'd also guess that Buck's love for Phyllis is just as great, and the werewolf is willingly letting Phyllis control it because of Buck."

Phyllis stood over the mortally wounded Dietrich, axe in hand and ready to complete the task of finishing him off.

"How can this be?" gurgled Dietrich to her in a cracked voice while he lay on the ground, blood gushing out from his gaping throat wound caused by the werewolf's bite. "No one has ever been able to resist or defy my control, until you!"

"You're too arrogant, proud, conceited, and evil to ever consider the fact that love is the most powerful force in the world," she answered him. "A heart full of love will defeat any evil, even yours."

"Titus, my brother, will bring many minions over and come to avenge me!" said Dietrich angrily to her. "They'll destroy you and this village!"

"Then, we will be waiting for them," she replied and raised the axe high above her head, and swung down with extreme vampire speed and force, beheading Dietrich on the spot and killing him.

A loud, screeching noise emerged from the throat of the vampire as his life force left his body, and then ceased moments later. Dietrich was dead. Carl and Brian walked over to Phyllis and stood in silence when they saw the dead body of

Dietrich. He was no longer a handsome-looking stranger, but a wrinkled, half-decayed, and headless body that looked more like a grotesque corpse.

"I hope he enjoys the rest of eternity in Hell!" exclaimed Carl. "It's where he belongs!"

"Phyllis, we're proud of you," said Brian.

She walked over and gave him and Carl a hug, and looked over toward Buck's werewolf, which was still just inside the trees, observing them. "I still feel like the same person. But now, I'm blessed with more abilities, which I will try to use for helping people, not harming them."

"You can be a new superhero!" joked Carl.

"Did I overhear him mention something about a brother Titus and minions?" asked Brian with concern.

"Can you two burn his body for me?" she asked them. "I will take Buck out into the wilderness for the rest of the night, but I will talk to the both you sometime tomorrow morning about Titus."

"We would be more than happy to burn him!" answered Carl. "But will you need to be back before the daylight? We don't want you to burn up, if you know what I'm saying."

"Dietrich told me that I wouldn't be able to go out into the sunlight, and that I'd burn up if I did. But I was able to bite and drink from him long enough to find out that some of the things he told me were a lie in order to manipulate and help control me," she answered. "I'll be able to go out in the sunlight, but will require more blood than normal if I do. Thank you both for caring enough and helping me through this ordeal, and putting your own lives at risk to help." She ran over to Buck's werewolf in a blur, said something into its ear, and they both disappeared into the darkness of the night and into the forest at a high rate of speed.

"Phyllis is one spectacular woman, or should I say, vampire," said Brian with admiration. "She even seems much stronger and more confident now."

"You better not let Nancy hear you say that," joked Carl. "Let's burn Dietrich to ashes, get a good night's sleep, and try to call our wives in the morning. Maybe they also can give us an update on the summit."

They grabbed their gas can from off the ground and near the back of the truck, put a gallon of gas into it from the store's pump, and poured it on Dietrich's head and body.

"Do you want the honors or shall I?" asked Brian.

"Since he was only going to break my legs but rip your heart out, then you should have the honors," answered Carl.

Brian lit the match on the matchbox and dropped it onto Dietrich, which set off a big bomb fire that quickly disintegrated the vampire into ashes.

"We did great teamwork today! All of us!" said Carl as he and Brian walked toward the bed and breakfast to sleep off the rest of the night in peace. "Maybe Phyllis can tip my truck back up on its wheels in the morning also."

"I'm sure she's strong enough now to do that, but I doubt she'll be able to repair your shattered windshield," replied Brian. "Your truck is a mess, and it won't be fun driving back to Fairville without a windshield!"

The two of them laughed as they walked from the store lot toward the bed and

breakfast cottage where they were staying at.

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CHAPTER 14

February 19, Early Saturday Morning

Phyllis and the shirtless and shoeless Buck in torn-up blue jeans walked into his cabin, after first needing to invite her in, and sat down on the couch together after a long, full moon night of running through the wilderness together. Buck's werewolf was long gone, and he felt fatigued and exhausted, but his desire to hug and hold Phyllis, and kiss her lips, was much greater than his need to sleep.

"Turning into a werewolf is really hard on my clothes," quipped Buck. "I have to get new clothes every month. And I don't care if you are a vampire now, Phyllis. I still love you more than anything." They kissed and caressed each other on the couch for five minutes, until Buck's need for sleep began to overpower him.

"I feel weak also," said Phyllis. "I think that I might need a little blood. I had so much fun being with you last night that I didn't think about looking for more animal blood than the rabbit I caught."

Buck lifted his arm up to Phyllis's mouth and told her to drink what she needed.

"I'm afraid," said Phyllis. "I don't want to hurt you in any way by drinking too much."

"It will be okay," replied Buck. "I trust you, and besides, remember that my werewolf side gives me rapid healing powers. We both have it now."

Phyllis reluctantly but gently bit into his arm with her new fangs and drank for fifteen seconds before forcing herself to stop. It felt much more satisfying to her than the rabbit she drank from during the night. Dietrich was correct when he told her that blood caused a euphoric feeling for vampires, especially human blood, and she didn't want to become a blood addict. "Thanks, Buck," she lovingly told him as she caressed him on his chest. "I feel refreshed now. You should sleep now, and I will tell you about Titus, Dietrich's brother, tonight. I am going to talk to Carl and Brian, and I'm sure they are anxious to leave for Fairville as soon as the highway has been cleared."

Phyllis hadn't finished her words when Buck had slumped down on the couch and fell asleep. She took a blanket and covered him with it, and bent over to kiss him good-bye on his cheek and whispered, "I love you," in his ear before disappearing out the door.

Carl and Brian were still at the bed and breakfast, having just finished their breakfast that they cooked, and talking with their wives and kids on their room phone for ten minutes each, when Phyllis knocked on the front door.

"Good morning, Phyllis. How are you?" Brian greeted.

"I think I'm going to be okay," she replied. "But can you invite me in please? Now that I'm a vampire, I can't enter into buildings without an invite."

"Yes, of course, please come in," he answered. "And that is also how the store's

wood shed saved our lives from Dietrich. We wouldn't invite him in, and he wasn't very happy about it!"

"Well, we have some good news," said Carl to Phyllis. "Our wives just told us that the summit should be cleared by this evening and we can travel back to Fairville in the morning."

"So glad to hear that," she responded.

"We were also wondering if you're strong enough to tip my truck back upright again," asked Carl with a chuckle.

"I can try, but can't promise you anything. I really don't know as of yet the extent of my new vampire abilities," she answered.

"We promise to clean our dishes and rooms before we leave, and leave enough cash for you to cover our utility usage and our stay here," said Brian.

"Thank you, and I wasn't going to ask for money, but that will be a big help to me," replied Phyllis. "I appreciate it."

"You mentioned last night that you needed to talk to us about Titus," said Brian with concern.

"Yes, thanks for reminding me," she answered. "Dietrich said that he has a slightly older and more powerful twin brother, who is currently residing somewhere in the Eastern Hemisphere, possibly Europe. Titus and Dietrich are supernaturally interlinked and have some kind of twin brother connection with one another, so if one of the brothers were severely hurt or died, the other brother would feel and know it within a day. Also, I was told that Titus has a small army of vampire minions at his disposal, something that Dietrich didn't want to create for himself very often, and according to Dietrich, just before I killed him, Titus and those minions would come here to avenge his death."

"I remember Dietrich telling me about some of his minions and a previous mate that he killed off fifty years ago," replied Brian.

"Are you telling us that another Dietrich-like clone, along with more vampires with supernatural abilities like yourself, will possibly be here in Circa in attack mode sometime in the near future?" asked Carl with great alarm.

"Yes, I'm afraid so, and it's anyone's guess as to when they'll arrive," answered Phyllis as a tear rolled down her left cheek from her left eye.

"Are you okay?" Brian asked. "You know that if or when they show up, you can call us anytime, and we'll both be here ASAP to help you and Buck fight against them in any way that we can help. We have friends in Fairville who have military-style assault rifles with long, banana clips, and I'm sure they would be glad to let us borrow them. The bullets might not affect Titus, but I'd bet they'll put a hurting on his vampire minions."

"We'll even bring some sharp machetes for some vampire decapitations if necessary," quipped Carl.

"Thank you both and I know you'll want to help, and I hope that I won't need to call you," she answered. "I'm just struggling with so many worries right now. Worries of Titus and worries of other things."

"Do you want to talk about it?" asked Carl.

Phyllis took a few seconds to collect her emotions and thoughts, and then opened up to them about her concerns. "If Titus does come, what happens if he

shows up after the full moon cycle is over and Buck's werewolf can't help in the fight?" she asked. "Or even if he attacked us during the full moon cycle, what if he shows up in the daytime, when Buck will be regenerating himself during a deep sleep, and I'll be on my own, and could even die alone if they kill me. Or worse yet, be abducted by them as Dietrich told me. There are so many things that could go wrong, and not to mention that it took all of us combined to bring down Dietrich. Do we really have a chance against Titus and an army? I won't even be as strong as his minions, who are sure to be much older and more powerful than me. And..." She paused, unable to finish her sentence.

"What's really bothering you, Phyllis?" asked Brian wisely. "Is there something else that is burdening you? I've been married a while, and I can seem to sense these sorts of things."

"I'm going to outlive Buck, my family, and my friends by thousands of years, while everyone I ever loved would grow old and die, leaving me behind and all alone! I don't want to be alone forever!" responded Phyllis as tears rolled down her face.

Brian and Carl walked up to her and put their arms around her, trying to help comfort her pain as best they could.

"After Buck got his werewolf curse, our personal lives had changed a lot, leaving me on my own and without him for a week every month, and now I'm a vampire who needs to drink blood, and I'm also afraid that the blood will change me for the worse! I drank some of Buck's blood because I felt weak, and I loved it! I felt strong and rejuvenated after drinking just a little. What if I get addicted to blood, and want or need more and more, and it turns me into a cold, cruel, heartless devil as Dietrich was? I just wanted a normal life with Buck, and to marry and have children, but now, we're both supernatural freaks, whose lives and future are drastically changed, which could eventually break us apart!" said Phyllis tearfully.

"Easy, Phyllis. You're all over the map with your emotions. If I had to guess, it sounds like your biggest fear is the loneliness factor of the vampire life," Brian told her after a moment to meditate on his thoughts. "When it comes to your personality changing into an evil vampire, because of blood and loneliness, I don't believe it's possible. And I'll always believe you'll have the love in your heart and ability to make friends who will love you, regardless of what century it will be."

"I agree," said Carl. "I'd have to see you turn evil to believe it! I've met a lot of people over the years through my job and friends, and I've never met a young lady with as much compassion, kindness, and love for others as you have, and if anyone could ever conquer the temptations of the vampire life, and only drink blood as needed, it's definitely you! We have faith in you."

"Thank you," Phyllis murmured as she wiped her eyes dry with a tissue. "It means a lot to me to hear that."

"Phyllis, did Dietrich tell you why he needed the full moon to turn you?" asked Brian.

"Yes. In a short and simple way, he and Titus were born and became vampires on a full moon night, so they both also need the full moon to create vampire life," she answered.

“Phyllis, I have an idea, but it’s kind of a long shot, and maybe Buck would agree with it if you asked him,” said Brian.

Phyllis listened intently to what Brian had to say.

“First, Buck is a new species of his kind, and none of us really know how long he will live. He could grow old like the rest of us, or his werewolf healing abilities could allow him to live as long as you. But there is one way to possibly guarantee it, and I bet Buck would be willing to try it.”

“What is your idea?” asked Phyllis with hope in her heart.

“Tonight, on the full moon, you could try biting him, to see if you can successfully turn him into a vampire also, which would solve most of the worries that you have. If Buck were a vampire as well, we’d all stand a much better chance against Titus, because you’d both be ready for him anytime he happened to show up. Day or night, full moon or not, Buck could fight by your side. And live as long as you live.”

Phyllis’s face lit up with a happy glow, and a smile came to her face after hearing Brian’s common sense logic, which would solve her loneliness worries and anxiety. “That’s an awesome idea, and I love it!” she responded, and quickly gave Brian and Carl a hug of appreciation. “I never asked Dietrich if minions and I would also have the ability to create new vampires like he and Titus could, but if a wolf was able to infect Buck, then I bet I could also. Transforming someone into a vampire weakened Dietrich some, taking some of his vitality, so I would expect the same of me, but I’ll ask Buck tonight, and I’m so thankful for you two being here!”

“We’re there for you and Buck anytime you need us, Phyllis,” said Carl, “always!”

“Thanks again,” she responded. “But I also wonder how Buck became a werewolf when he wasn’t bitten under the full moon, like I had to be in order to become a vampire.”

“Kind of hard to say for sure,” answered Brian. “The infected bite and curse could have reacted differently in an animal or could have stayed dormant inside of Buck until the next full moon arrived would be my guess.”

“I’ll go and attempt to tip your truck back upright,” said Phyllis. “I’d like to know how strong I am also. I already know that I’m super fast; let me see if I’m also super strong!” She laughed excitedly. She was out of the door in a flash and at their truck in five seconds, which lay on its side nearly a quarter of a mile from the bed and breakfast. She first walked over, placing both her hands on the tailgate, and pulled the truck back a few feet and away from the shed, as Dietrich had wedged the front bumper and grille in the shed door. She then followed that by placing both her hands under the cab of the truck, and gently lifted, unsure of what she could do. She managed to barely lift the truck three feet off the ground, and with difficulty, before setting it back down again. *Hmm,* she thought to herself, realizing that it would take her strongest effort to raise a half-ton truck completely upright again. She strengthened her grip and mustered up every ounce of energy from within herself, and lifted up as hard as she could, which managed to propel Carl’s truck upright and back on all four wheels again. Her effort was successful but weakened her, leaving her body craving for more blood. She

remembered what Dietrich told her when he said that the more blood she drank, the longer it would stay in her system, as she had only drank a small amount from Buck earlier.

“Nice job!” exclaimed Carl as he and Brian came walking toward the truck. “Thank you!”

“Please, don’t come any closer!” exclaimed Phyllis as she leaned against Carl’s truck in her fatigued and weakened condition, trying to fight off the thoughts and scent of their human blood from her mind.

“What’s wrong?” asked Brian with concern.

“I’m weak and need blood! If I can get some strength back, I’ll go search for an animal, but I haven’t drank very much blood since I was turned, and I already expended a lot of energy. Now I’m feeling ill,” she answered. “This is becoming hard to fight against!”

Carl and Brian stopped and looked at each other in silence, both thinking of a way to help her, and summoning up some courage to offer her their own blood.

“Ah heck,” said Carl as he shook his head while trying not to second-guess himself. “It’s my truck and she’s been a huge help, and I care about her!” He walked over to her, rolled up his sleeve, and raised his arm up to her mouth. “Just try not to take it all if you can help it.” He cringed nervously.

“I’m sorry, Carl, and I hope you understand how embarrassing this is for me, but I can’t help it!” responded Phyllis as she slipped her fangs into Carl’s arm, drinking for ten seconds before forcing herself to stop again. “Thanks,” she sighed, feeling relieved and rejuvenated again as if she satisfied a drug withdrawal with a fix. “When I was human, the thought of drinking blood disgusted me! But I’m a vampire now, and my body craves for it when I feel weak. I underestimated how powerful the urge would be.”

“You’ll always seem human to us,” replied Carl.

“I’m going to go find a caribou instead. That will last me a few days, so I don’t have to keep sipping on human blood,” said Phyllis with concern in her voice. “And then I’m going to go stay with Buck for the rest of the afternoon until he wakes up this evening.”

“Would you like us to open and manage the store for you today?” asked Brian.

“Oh, thank you, and I appreciate you asking, but usually, we keep it closed on Saturdays, unless its tourist season or someone desperately needs us to open it in an emergency,” she answered. “No one is hardly around now anyways.” Then she sped off again in a blur, disappearing into the forest, in search of caribou blood.

“Are you okay?” Brian asked Carl as he inspected his arm.

“Perfectly fine,” he answered. “Just look at my arm. There are two puncture wounds but barely any remnants of blood showing, and it wasn’t even painful. I hope she has better success at finding caribou than we did.”

“I sure hope Phyllis will be okay with this whole needing blood thing,” said Brian. “We have no idea what it must be like for her, or how to really help her get through this.”

“What do you say we head back to the bed and breakfast and chill out for the rest of the day?” asked Carl after inspecting the newly acquired dents and damage to the left side of his truck, which also included a broken driver’s side mirror.

“Great idea,” answered Brian as they climbed into Carl’s truck, then they drove toward the bed and breakfast cottage.

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CHAPTER 15

Saturday Night, 8:00 PM

Phyllis woke up from her four-hour-long nap that she took while she lay beside Buck's side, and he also began to awaken from his daylong deep sleep.

"Well hello, my vampire hot girlfriend whom I love," said Buck as he rolled onto his back and put his arm around Phyllis, pulling her close to him and kissing her. He quickly noticed the time on his clock. "I've got fifteen minutes left before I start the whole early stages of my werewolf business again, so maybe you should tell me about this Titus character now."

"I'm glad you mentioned that," said Phyllis. "There is something besides that I need to talk to you about, and something to ask you."

"Anything for you," he responded.

"Let me start with Titus first," she said. "He is the 3,000-year-old identical twin vampire brother of Dietrich, who had created vampire minions like me, possibly even a small army of them, and who all could be on their way to Circa even now to avenge Dietrich's death."

Buck's face turned white, and his jaw dropped, along with a worried look in his eyes at hearing her news. "That is not good news," he said with grave concern. "How does he know about Dietrich's death?"

"Dietrich and Titus were supernaturally interlinked together, and Titus would have felt Dietrich's death within twenty-four hours, even having the ability to sense his location," she answered. "And Dietrich also told me that Titus came from their mother's womb first, and is slightly more powerful than he was."

"That's not cool," replied Buck. "It took all we could muster up just to bring down Dietrich, and I'm sure we could get Titus, too, but if he brings more vampires, we could be in over our heads, and he's 3,000 years old. Wow! Just who were their parents anyway? They didn't do a very good job at training and raising them the right way!"

"Their mom was a prostitute for the Philistine army, who was killed by their father, Goliath of Gath, when they were two years old," she answered. "They became vampires when he tossed them into a cave to die, where they were repeatedly bitten by vampire bats. They were both born and became vampires on a night of a full moon, which is why he wanted to turn me into a vampire last night at 9:00 PM, because of the full moon."

"Did you say Goliath? Did you mean *the* Goliath of the Old Testament, *that* Goliath? Oh my, ugh!" moaned Buck loudly as he begun to experience painful stomach cramps from the early stage one of his werewolf transitioning.

"You don't have a lot of time left, Buck, so I'll explain more about him tomorrow and cut to the chase quickly," she said. "If Titus and his minions come to Circa when you're a werewolf, even then, we'll still have difficulty beating

them. But if they come during your non-werewolf period, we'll definitely have no chance to stop them, and Circa could be in serious jeopardy. The timing would have to work out perfectly for us, with them coming at next month's full moon, and I just have a bad feeling that they'll be here sooner."

"That's a great point, Phyllis. Then, somehow, we need to find a way to help us even the odds and be ready to kick their asses when they show up," exclaimed Buck as his body started to sweat, along with having mild muscle spasms. "Ugh!" he moaned from increasing discomfort.

"There is a way, Buck. A way that we could even the odds, and be more prepared to fight them on our terms."

"What's your idea?" asked Buck, as he now sank to the floor of his cabin, beginning to writhe around in ever-increasing pain.

"Let me bite you, Buck, at 9:00 PM during the beginning of the full moon, as Dietrich had done to me last night, and turn you into a vampire, too!" she pleaded. "If you're also a vampire, you won't need the full moon to fight them, but will be able to defend Circa at anytime. Both of us will be fighting against them together. I'll explain to you tomorrow about the full moon story and why it's needed to create vampires, but for tonight, I'm asking you to trust me."

Buck lay on the floor in silence, carefully pondering what she asked of him.

"And I don't know how long you will live, Buck," she went on to say, "but I will probably live as long as the Earth remains, and alone after everyone I love grows old and dies. If you choose not to, then I'll understand, but please don't let me spend the rest of my existence alone and especially without you!" Phyllis she began to cry.

"Ssshhh, ssshhh, it's okay, Phyllis," said Buck as he wrapped his arms around her and kissed her on the forehead, trying to provide comfort for her despite his own stage two transitioning pain. "I would do anything for you, Phyllis, because I love you more than anything, and there is no one who I would want to spend eternity with more than you. I don't know if your plan will work, but it sounds like a great idea to me, and I say, let's go for it. My life has already changed drastically from being a werewolf, so I doubt adding a vampire to my personality collection will make much more of a difference."

"I love you so much, Buck, and I'm sure this will work!" she replied as she kissed his lips and caressed him.

"We better go outside now, before my werewolf tears my cabin apart. And please be careful when you bite me at the same time that I'll be transitioning. I don't want you to get hurt," said Buck with concern.

Phyllis helped Buck up from off the floor and supported his sweat soaked body and weight as he staggered out of his front door.

9:00 PM, Near Buck's cabin

"Ugh! Do it now, Phyllis, quickly, before I wolf out completely! I won't be able to fight against it much longer!" Buck said with desperation in a frightening, deeper voice, and with low pitched growls.

Phyllis bent over as Buck lay on the snow-covered ground, and gently slipped

her fangs into his neck and veins, which now was covered in rapidly growing, brown wolf's hair, biting and releasing him after fifteen seconds, hoping she had injected him with the vampire saliva and infection curse, that was now completely active with the full moon. She held her breath as she watched Buck's werewolf cease its transition, and then he faded into unconsciousness, which also happened with her after she was bitten by Dietrich. Phyllis, who was also feeling weakened herself from her transformation of Buck, staggered up and sped to the trees behind Buck's cabin, grabbing a caribou carcass that she killed and hid earlier, which was still full of blood, and dragged it over to Buck for the both of them to feed upon after he regained consciousness. Phyllis was surprised but also excited, as the nearly transitioned werewolf just moments earlier had now re-transitioned back into Buck and his human body. Buck slowly regained consciousness and started to move cautiously as, if he just awoke from a deep sleep.

"How do you feel, Buck? Are you okay? Do you feel different?" asked Phyllis.

Buck slowly stood up while looking at himself, and responded, "I feel weird, but I think I'm fine." No sooner had he finished his words when he started to transition again, back into his werewolf.

Phyllis gasped and felt helpless as she watched Buck slowly regain his beastly werewolf form under the full moon. The werewolf began to take aggressive steps toward Phyllis, snapping its jaws and teeth, but then suddenly ceased its aggressive behavior.

"Easy, Buck, easy," Phyllis said softly to the beast with her hand on its muscular, furry chest. *It didn't work!* she thought to herself while feeling discouragement. But then, just several seconds later, Buck fell to one knee, as he re-transitioned back into his human form in just a few seconds. She gasped. "What happened, Buck?"

"I'm not sure," he answered while scratching his head in disbelief. "I was turning into my werewolf, and then I thought in my mind how I didn't want to transition. I was even able to fight against the transition after becoming the beast and turned back to wonderful me again! It's as if I controlled my own transition with mere thoughts and will power."

"If that were true, Buck, do you know how wonderful that would be?" asked Phyllis with great excitement.

"Let me do a little experiment and see," said Buck. He stood still as he closed his eyes and concentrated. Seconds later, he began to transition into his werewolf form and became fully transformed in under ten seconds. Howlooooooooooooh. The sound echoed loudly through the night as Buck's intimidating werewolf beast howled thunderously at the moon, but then easily re-transformed into his human form again soon after. "No way!" he exclaimed excitedly. "I can choose to transform or not to transform just with intense focus and thoughts! And I can even seem to control the wolf's aggressive predatory instincts now just from sheer will power, when before, I was helpless to control or stop my beast from doing whatever it wanted!"

"Oh, Buck, do you know what this means? This is such fantastic news for both of us!" exclaimed Phyllis with joy. "I had no idea that this would happen when I turned you!"

“This is the best gift that you could have ever given to me, Phyllis!” exclaimed Buck.

“For me also,” she responded as Buck and her quickly began to hug and kiss each other with joy and tears. “You should drink some caribou blood, Buck,” she said. “We both need to feed, but whatever it takes, please be careful with your blood consumption. So far, I’m finding blood to be very euphoric and potentially addictive, and it frightens me. Especially with human blood, as it is even more satisfying and potentially dangerous for us.”

Buck held her hand before softly replying, “We’ll need to help and protect each other at all costs, and keep one another accountable. And I know we both don’t want to hurt any humans unless absolutely necessary, in self-defense, or for the protection of our loved ones.”

The two of them hugged again, and then quickly bent down to drink blood from the caribou carcass, inserting their new fangs into the neck of the animal and swallowing down a few mouthfuls of blood before forcing themselves to stop.

“I see what you mean, Phyllis,” responded Buck. “I got some nice, instant energy going on now, and the blood tasted great! I also wonder if this means that I’m half werewolf and half vampire now. Like a hybrid or something, especially since I now seem to have and feel the characteristics and strengths from both species inside of me. I just can’t wait to see if I can turn into a werewolf tomorrow, during the daytime, and with no full moon.”

“What a weapon you could be against Titus if that is true,” replied Phyllis. “Even if you can’t, you still already could be double your normal strength!”

“We should drain the rest of the caribou’s blood out into a container and put it into my fridge, before the carcass becomes frozen or eaten by scavengers. As of now, though, I got all this energy that I need to put to good use,” said Buck as he swept Phyllis off her feet and carried her in his arms at blazing supernatural speed to his front door, where it felt as if he had hit a brick wall when he tried to enter into his own cabin, catching him by surprise and causing him to stumble backward.

Phyllis began to laugh loudly. “Looks like we both forgot that you can’t enter into your own cabin without an invite,” she said. “It’s the downside of being a vampire.”

“Good thing I already invited you in earlier then,” quipped Buck as he let her down, so she could step inside and invite him in. He quickly scooped her back up in his arms again once inside, kissing her on her lips, before closing his door and the world behind, leaving Phyllis to glow with delight.

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CHAPTER 16

February 20, Sunday

Carl hung up the room's phone inside the bed and breakfast after talking with his wife Jessica and daughter Cindy for thirty minutes, and telling them that he loved them. "Good news, Buzz!" he exclaimed.

"What's the word, Grizz?" asked Brian.

"Jessica said the summit's road is cleared again, and we can go home!"

"That's great news! I hate to go home without a caribou, but we did far more important things here this weekend, and I'll return home satisfied."

"Amen to that! I still haven't figured out whether to tell her what really happened here, but I think its best that my family doesn't know. They would start worrying about vampires and werewolves, and Jessica wouldn't ever want me to come back here again. By the way, she also told Nancy that we'll both be headed back, and they each called our employers, so our bosses know as well."

"What's Jessica going to say when she sees your badly damaged truck?" asked Brian with a chuckle.

"I'll tell her that I let you drive it and that you rolled it on its side," answered Carl with a laugh.

"I wonder how Buck and Phyllis did last night with their vampire transition thing," Brian said. "Tonight is the last full moon, so by tomorrow morning, Buck will be free for a little while, but I, at least, hope that Buck agreed to try it. I'd really worry about Phyllis if he didn't."

"We should say good-bye to them before we head back, and thank Phyllis for letting us stay here," said Carl.

"Agreed," responded Brian. "And clean up our mess, and leave her some money."

They each pulled out $250 in cash from their wallets and left it on the counter in an envelope, on which they had written her name and a big thank you.

After eating breakfast and spending the last hour cleaning up the inside, Carl and Brian locked the front door of the bed and breakfast, then they walked outside.

"It's going to be a beautiful day today," said Brian after taking a deep breath of fresh, cool air, and looking toward the morning sun on the horizon, which was slowly creeping up over the distant trees.

Carl didn't have a chance to respond before they saw Buck and Phyllis walking toward them, holding hands, and both displaying big smiles on their faces.

"Well, good morning to you both," said Carl. "We were just going to drop by and say good-bye before we head back to Fairville this morning. My wife, Jessica, said the summit is finally cleared."

"That's good news!" responded Buck as he shook both their hands, followed by

Phyllis giving them both a good-bye hug. “We can’t thank you two enough for all your help, and I’m especially grateful for the help you’ve given to Phyllis.”

“And thank you for letting us stay at your uncle’s bed and breakfast,” said Brian to Phyllis. “We left you some money inside and cleaned the place up for you.”

“Awesome!” she excitedly responded. “And thank you!”

“No problem. And I almost forgot to give you the keys back for his cottage,” he said as he tossed her the keys for the bed and breakfast.

“Will you need us to invite you inside the store before we leave so you can get in?” asked Carl.

“That’s a great thought,” laughed Phyllis, “but since I was turned into a vampire inside the store, I won’t need an invite, and I can invite Buck inside myself.”

“Please promise that you’ll call us when or if Titus shows up,” said Carl to Buck and Phyllis. “When we get back home, we’ll start preparing for that possible day by finding appropriate weaponry that can best help us to aid you in the fight. Hopefully, that day would never come, but if it does, hopefully, we’re still around to help.” Then he joked, “Brian and I are going to be hunters of evil vampires.”

“Speaking of vampires, are you now a vampire or are you still a werewolf?” Brian asked Buck.

“Actually, I’m both,” answered Buck. “Phyllis was successful at turning me into a vampire last night, but I’m also still a werewolf. And here’s the great news! I can now control my werewolf’s violent and predatory nature with strong will power, meaning it won’t attack anything unless I allow it to. And even greater news is the fact that I can decide to transition or not to transition into a werewolf just with my thoughts. I have to concentrate and focus hard when I do, but it works.”

“Wow!” responded Brian. “That’s incredibly great news!”

Carl nodded in agreement. “Can you turn into a werewolf anytime that you want to now?”

“No,” answered Buck. “I tried transforming this morning, just for kicks, but couldn’t, as I still need the full moon in order to bring the werewolf side completely out. But I now feel all of its power and strength inside of me, much more than before, combined with the strength and power of the vampire also, which makes me feel twice as lethal now!”

“If Titus shows up in the daytime, do you think you can handle him in your present form, without the full werewolf?” asked Brian.

“Titus won’t be easy to defeat, just as hard as Dietrich was, maybe even more. But what little I lose from not being a werewolf, I’ve more than gained back with being a vampire also. When fighting Dietrich, there were advantages of being a werewolf naturally, with its teeth, claws, and aggressiveness, but also disadvantages, in being unable to control it, or nonstrategic when fighting. The werewolf just wants to bull rush in at full speed, like a wild animal in attack mode, biting and ripping without thinking, and leaving itself open to a possible counterattack. But now, because of my new vampire side, I feel just as strong now as when a werewolf under the full moon, if not stronger, and will be able to use my brains, weapons, and strategy when fighting them. Ideally, though, it would

work out the best if they showed up on the night of a full moon, so I could have both options at my disposal."

"I wonder if you'll still need to regenerate the following day, if you choose to use the werewolf side," Brian said.

"That, I'm not completely sure about yet," answered Buck. "But I'm hoping that I'll be able to regenerate just from drinking blood instead."

"Well, just please, both of you be careful with your blood consumption, and try to consume as needed," said Brian. "I don't want to sound like your dad, and really can't understand what blood feels like for a vampire, but as a pharmacist, I've seen many good people become addicted to painkillers, and their lives changed for the worst because of it. I've even seen people become hooked on food, to the point where food was all they could think about. If you ever get hooked on blood like that, you might not even be able to stop yourselves from hurting your friends."

"We don't see you as a nagging dad," replied Buck, "but as a really good friend who cares. Thanks again!"

Brian and Carl shook Buck's hand, and gave Phyllis a good-bye hug one last time, before climbing into Carl's truck and heading back to Fairville, waving good-bye as they drove away.

"Sure going to be a long drive back to Fairville with no windshield," said Carl. "Good thing that we brought lots of warm clothes and sunglasses."

Brian didn't reply to what Carl said, as he had drifted off into a daydream state of mind, thinking about Buck and Phyllis as Carl drove over the wooden bridge and back down the Reese Highway toward home.

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CHAPTER 17

Carl slowly stepped down on the accelerator of his truck as they began to ascend up the steep hill toward the top of Hawk Summit, with Circa thirty-five miles behind them. “I wonder if we should have stopped back at our campsite and collected our tent and supplies we left behind before continuing home,” he said aloud.

“Perhaps we should have, but I bet Buck’s werewolf took care of it for us,” Brian joked. “When we get to the top of the summit, let’s pull over, get out, and stretch our legs and take some pictures. It’s such a beautiful February Sunday morning, and it’s such a great scenic view on top!”

“Ten-four to that!” exclaimed Carl as his truck continued around the road’s many sharp turns and corners, climbing toward the top, before finally leveling into a straight section of the road, where they could now see the 3,800-foot peak just a mile ahead. “Interesting,” he said as he and Brian noticed a huge white cloud of snow dust rising up from the road, near the top, which also clung to a steep mountainside. “What is going on up ahead?” he asked as he drove a little farther for a closer view, and pulled to the side of the road and parked.

“It looks like another avalanche happening!” exclaimed Brian. “See all the snow coming down from the mountainside on the left side of the road?”

“How can this be happening?” Carl said with agitation. “It’s a beautiful day out, and there’s not a cloud in the sky! There’s not even any wind!”

Brian grabbed the 7-21x40 binoculars from under the seat and began to survey the area. He first looked at the road. “It looks like it’s blocked off with snow again, and we can’t get through!”

“Damn it!” barked Carl.

And then Brian scanned the top of the mountainside, which hung above the road, trying to spot whatever could be causing the current avalanche. “What the hell?’

“Do you see something?” asked Carl as he watched Brian scanning the top of the mountain with the binoculars.

“Oh, no!” said Brian with extreme concern in his voice. “It can’t be! Not this soon! Please tell me it isn’t true!”

“I can’t see very well without the binoculars, Brian,” responded Carl. “What is it?”

“I see six people dressed in black leather up on the top and near the peak. And one of them is stomping with amazing speed and power on the snow with his left foot, causing the avalanche! And the one causing the entire ruckus looks a lot like Dietrich!”

“Oh, hell no!” exclaimed Carl with extreme worry in his voice. “Titus and his

minions are already here?

"And he's blocking Circa and us all in, and keeping everyone else out!" answered Brian.

"How'd they get way up there? And how'd they travel to Alaska from Europe so quickly?"

"They're very powerful supernatural beings, which can do extraordinary things, and it's hard for us humans to comprehend it," answered Brian. "If it's any consolation, though, at least his army is a lot smaller than I would have guessed."

"We've got to get back to Circa and warn Buck and Phyllis!" exclaimed Carl as he turned his truck around slowly, hoping to go unnoticed by them while driving back toward Circa. He increased his speed after they were out-of-sight distance from them.

"Hope we get there before they do," said Brian with concern. "We don't have any bullets, weapons, or any sharp blades other than our hunting knives."

"Maybe the store has some.270 ammunition on the shelf, but if not, hopefully, Buck has a rifle or shotgun that we can use," replied Carl.

"Anything that we can get our hands on is better than rifles with no bullets," replied Brian. "I'll even try looking for a bow and arrows if need be."

"That gives me an idea," replied Carl.

"What is it?" asked Brian.

"If we could find a bow and some arrows, along with some black powder, we could design small explosives with small fuses to tie at the end of the arrows, and light them as we shoot them. They won't affect Titus, but I bet they'll slow his minions down."

"I like it, Carl, I like it a lot," replied Brian, as Carl continued driving a fast but safe speed back toward the direction of Circa. Brian was about to ask Carl a question when he was interrupted by a very loud thunderous noise on the rooftop of the truck, which momentarily startled them to the point of Carl almost losing control of his vehicle and sliding off the highway, nearly crashing over and down the steep embankment.

"What was that?" Carl said loudly as he regained control of his truck.

Brian was about to roll down the passenger window to see when a white male's upside-down bald head peeked down from the top of the truck's cab roof and looked at them through the glassless windshield. Carl and Brian were both in stunned silence as they had a stare down with someone who they knew had to be one of Titus's minions. Brian hoped that his movement would go unnoticed as he slowly reached his right hand down to retrieve his hunting knife from under the seat.

The minion briefly sniffed the air from inside of the truck's cab. "I smell your fresh, warm blood, and it will taste most satisfying and also gratify us!" he exclaimed before he began to reach inside the cab in an attempt to grab Carl and yank him from behind the steering wheel.

"Get the bastard away from me!" shouted Carl to Brian, as he attempted to swat the minion's hand away with his right arm, while at the same time, trying to drive without crashing.

The distraction gave Brian the perfect chance to quickly grab his hunting knife

and thrust it deeply into the right side of the minion's neck. The minion became enraged as he clutched the knife's handle and disappeared out of sight, back up onto the rooftop of the truck's cab again. Brian and Carl were dead quiet as they listened for any possible sign of the minion still being on top. Bam! The noise was as loud as a gunshot, as the minion's right hand and arm came crashing down through the metal rooftop, clutching the handle of Brian's knife, trying to slash at them and cut them with the sharp blade. Brian and Carl were both desperately dodging and weaving in any direction possible just to avoid being cut by the hunting knife while frightened out of their minds.

"I've had enough of this nonsense!" exclaimed Carl, and he slammed onto his trucks brake pedal as hard as he could with his foot, and from a speed of sixty mph, which propelled the vampire minion from off the rooftop, and rolling down over the truck's hood and falling down hard onto the road, tumbling head over heels, again and again, finally coming to a stop fifteen yards in front of them.

"Run him over! Run that SOB over!" shouted Brian with fright.

"With pleasure," answered Carl as he now pushed the throttle fully to the floor, and rapidly increased the trucks speed in the direction of the minion, who was now staggering to his feet, and glaring at them with an icy stare and frightening expression of anger and revenge on his face!. Wham! Carl's speedometer was hitting fifty-five mph when the truck's front grille smashed into the vampire minion, forcing him underneath the truck as they run him over. The tail end of Carl's truck briefly bucked into the air as one of its rear tires rolled over the minion and quickly came crashing to the ground again. He observed in the rearview mirror the minion lying motionless on the ground as he sped off and out of his sight.

"Do you think we killed him?" asked Brian.

"That would be great if we did, but somehow, I doubt it. But even if not, we sure put an ass whooping on him that he won't forget for a while!" quipped Carl as he and Brian gave each other high fives and continued on toward Circa. "Now I got a busted windshield, a hole in my roof, a smashed-up left side, and dents in the back! My insurance company will be asking a lot of questions."

The vampire minion, who still lay in the middle of the road, began to regain his consciousness and movement after five minutes, and Carl's truck was now long gone. He slowly sat up in the road to inspect his short and stocky battered body, noticing his wounds were just slowly beginning to supernaturally heal, when four other people had walked up and surrounded him. "Titus," he said to the person who was standing in front of him, and looking down on him. "I think I need some blood. I'm healing at a slower rate than usual, but I've never been hurt like this before, either."

"The blood that you and the others needed was inside that truck, which you failed to stop!" answered an angry Titus. "What happened?"

"I'm sorry I failed you, Titus, but they ran over me, and the two of them got away before I could recover," answered the wounded minion. "I miscalculated in my failed attempt and I promise that it won't happen again."

"Failure is not an option, nor is miscalculation permitted. Get up, Thomas!" barked Titus.

“Yes, Titus, forgive me,” replied Thomas as he stood up. “Have mercy,” pleaded the doomed Thomas, who, just ten minutes earlier, was on the verge of killing Carl and Brian, but now was in fear for his own vampire life.

“Mercy and forgiveness are for the saints to give, not for me!” responded Titus.

Thomas gasped for his last breath of air as Titus thrust his left hand and forearm through his stomach, to his spinal column, where he firmly gripped his six fingers onto his spine and yanked with extreme force, pulling his spinal cord, vertebra, and brain stem back out through his stomach and away from his body, then tossing it aside. Thomas, the 150-year-old vampire minion, was dead in an instant and collapsed back down to the road in a motionless heap.

“Such a waste of vampire potential and talent, but it shouldn’t require many minions to take down a small village, so it’s doubtful that Thomas will be missed. Move him off the road and into the woods for the ravens to feed on,” commanded Titus to three of the minions. “And then we’ll go to Circa and accomplish what we came here to do.”

“Sir, if I may ask, are you okay?” one of the female minions asked Titus. “You’ve been very angry and intolerant with us recently, and killing one of your own servants seems odd behavior, even for you.”

“Perhaps you’re right, Billie, and I don’t intend to frighten or intimidate you,” answered Titus. “But Dietrich’s connection can no longer be felt inside me, and it has me disturbed. I’ve felt his connection for 3,000 years and now it’s gone, which means he’s dead. Dietrich and I are nearly indestructible, and have fought against thousands of foes over the centuries, so it’s beyond my comprehension as to how he managed to get himself killed in a small village in Alaska! And I’ll tear the whole village apart—piece by piece if need be—to find those who are responsible! They will suffer a cruel, slow death, I promise!”

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CHAPTER 18

Carl hurriedly drove his truck over the wooden bridge and toward the store in Circa, hoping to find Phyllis and Buck there.

"If they're not at the store, then we'll check the bed and breakfast and Buck's cabin, but we need to find them in a hurry," said Brian.

"The store isn't open on Sundays, but maybe they just dropped by there quickly," replied Carl. "Hopefully, they're not out looking for a caribou." He turned his truck into the parking lot of the store and saw Buck and Phyllis outside, attempting to repair the damages that were done to the wood shed by Dietrich, him, and Brian.

"Nice timing," said Brian as Carl drove up to the shed and shut his truck off, while noticing a look of surprise on the faces of Buck and Phyllis.

"Did you guys forget something?" asked Phyllis.

"I wish it were that simple," answered Brian. "We have a serious crisis now and we don't have much time."

"What is it?" asked Buck. "I hope you're not referring to what I think you might be referring to."

"Titus and five of his vampire minions are already as close as the summit, and are heading toward Circa!" answered Brian. "Titus even caused another avalanche, so we're trapped here again!"

"And one of them put another whooping on my truck and tried to kill us," said Carl. "We were very fortunate to escape."

"Oh no," gasped Phyllis. "They're here much sooner than I expected. We really haven't had a chance to prepare yet."

"We need to prepare in a hurry then," said Buck.

"We need to look in the store and see if there are more.270 Winchester ammunition on the shelf, if that's okay," Brian said. "If not, we need to find weapons in a hurry."

"I'll take them inside," Buck told Phyllis. "Can you warn the remaining people in the village to not open their doors to any strangers, and especially not to invite them inside their homes under any circumstances? And if you see Titus before we do, do not approach him without me."

"No danger of that," replied Phyllis as she and Buck quickly hugged and kissed each other on the lips, and encouraged one another with whispers, before she disappeared to warn their people.

"Let's go inside," said Buck to Carl and Brian, escorting them into the store to look for ammunition.

"I should try to call Nancy on the pay phone, to tell her we're stranded again," said Brian.

“You can use the phone inside the store,” Buck said to Brian.

Carl walked over to the shelf with its various kinds of hunting ammunition stocked on top, hoping to find any kind of.270 caliber bullets, while Buck handed the phone to Brian.

“I think the phone is dead,” said Brian.

“Really?” Buck replied as he took the phone to check for himself. “Dead as a doornail! I wonder if Titus had something to do with that.”

“There’s no. 270 ammunition, either,” Carl informed them.

“Let’s go over to Ron’s garage,” replied Buck. “He had a lot of guns and knives there, and I know he had a.308 rifle. I’ve got a 30/06 rifle, but no bullets.”

Carl drove into the large, open parking lot of Ron’s garage with Brian, which was a medium-sized red building with a large garage bay door on the front that was big enough to fit a school bus through, two night security floodlights above the door, and two small windows on the front, one on each side of the large bay door. Buck was already there and unlocking the main side door with a key that Ron always hid under the outside floor mat. Buck pushed open the door but stood outside waiting for them.

“You’re going to have to invite me in,” said Buck as Carl and Brian stepped inside the door of the darkened garage with its small windows, which didn’t allow for much sunlight to shine in. “And the light switch is on your right.”

“That must be a little annoying for you,” Carl told Buck as he flipped the lights on.

“Come on in, Buck,” said Brian, inviting him inside.

“Yes, it is a little annoying, and if not for Phyllis, I couldn’t have gotten into my own cabin, but I think I’m beginning to get used to it,” answered Buck. “Ron’s room was in the back of the garage. We can start there first.”

Brian and Carl observed and glanced through the inside of the garage with its various kinds of different tools that Ron had hanging on his garage wall, above and on a workbench, as they walked through the garage bay and past a hydraulic car lift toward the back. Brian also noticed a big, red toolbox with a nail gun on top, which he thought could be a possible weapon to use against the minions.

“Check that out,” Carl said to Brian, pointing to a calendar on the wall with a picture of a 1969 Ford Mustang, and a gorgeous female blond wearing a yellow bikini sitting on its white hood.

“Easy, Carl,” chuckled Brian.

“I was looking at the Mustang, not the hot girl,” Carl said, laughing.

“Awesome!’ exclaimed Buck from inside Ron’s room.

When Carl and Brian walked in, they saw Buck holding Ron’s.308 caliber rifle in his hands and aiming it toward the back wall.

“One of you can use this,” Buck told them. “And it looks like he still has plenty of ammo left for it. It should be dead on at 200 yards.”

“Give it to Brian. I’ll use that weapon instead,” said Carl, eyeing the twelve-gauge pump-action shotgun leaning against the rear corner wall, next to a small bed, and three boxes of buckshot beneath it.

“Looks like you two have you’re weapons. Now let me look in Ron’s closet to see if he has the weapon that Phyllis needs,” said Buck. He poked his head in the

closet to look around before reaching in, and pulling out an 1852 Prussian saber sword that Ron had since his childhood. “Looks like he kept it very sharp, too,” he said as he caressed his right thumb down the thirty-three-inch blade, made of 1055 high carbon steel, testing for its sharpness.

“Sweet!” replied Carl. “Phyllis already decapitated Dietrich with an axe, maybe she can get Titus with that sword, too.”

“I don’t want Phyllis near Titus, if possible,” responded Buck. “I plan on dealing with him myself while you three take down his minions.”

“Will you need a weapon also?” Brian asked Buck.

“Maybe, maybe not, but just in case, it won’t hurt to have this,” said Buck as he pulled out a compound bow from the closet with five arrows attached to it.

“Double sweet!” said Brian as he saw the compound bow. “Carl had a good idea earlier as we were driving back to Circa. If there’s any black powder around, it’s possible to make small explosives that could be attached to the end of the arrows, depending on whether we have time or not.”

“Great idea,” answered Buck. “I’m almost positive that there’s black powder on the store shelf for muzzle loaders, and we also have some small bean bags, which might work.”

“We could fill some of those bean bags with black powder, find some type of fuses to put in them, and light them as you’re shooting Titus with them,” said Carl. “Dietrich seemed to slowly get weaker as we shot him while you fought him, and it might also help to weaken Titus in the same manner before you attack him. We just need to make sure that we keep him away from feeding on blood any way possible, while you and Phyllis keep your blood intake up as you fight.”

“I agree with you on that, Carl,” Buck replied. “Phyllis and I will need to be at full strength. I’m hoping we can battle them tonight on the last full moon, when I’ll be at my absolute best, but it might not work out that way. Either way, we’ll need to be ready for them.”

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CHAPTER 19

They each grabbed the weapons that they wanted and walked back out of the garage, turning the lights off behind them and shutting the door. Buck stood still in the parking lot of the garage, glancing around and thinking, while Carl and Brian watched, wondering what he was pondering.

"This might be the best place to make our stand," said Buck. "There's a great sight advantage here for good shots at them, good protection inside the garage for you two if things start to get ugly, and big night security floodlights outside the building if it gets dark. Phyllis and I can see in the dark just fine, but you'll both need lights."

"Good point, Buck," replied Brian as Phyllis quickly ran up to them.

"I warned everyone who stayed in the village about Titus," she told Buck. "They're all going to shut down their lights, lock their doors, and stay out of sight."

"Excellent," responded Buck. "We've decided to make our stand here, since it appears to give us the best tactical advantage against them. I need to run up to the store quickly and grab some black powder and bean bags to make explosives with, and then I'll be right back. Carl or Brian will need to invite you into the garage, and you all can start preparing."

Phyllis nodded in agreement and then her face lit up with excitement as he handed her the sword.

"This is your weapon, for minion decapitations," he told her.

"Very nice," she responded. Then she sadly asked, "This was Ron's sword, wasn't it?"

"Yes, it was, and I know he'd want you to have it," he answered before kissing her on the cheek and speeding off to the store.

Brian and Carl invited Phyllis into the garage as they walked back inside again, while also turning the lights back on. Carl began eagerly loading his shotgun, and Brian likewise loaded Ron's rifle, while Phyllis stood silent and distracted, glancing around the garage.

"Is everything okay, Phyllis?" asked Brian.

"Being in this garage just made me realize how much I miss Ron, and I've been so distracted with everything else lately, I feel guilty for having not thought about him much,' she answered.

"Well, I didn't know Ron, but I bet he would have understood, and would have wanted you to focus on saving yourself and others," replied Brian.

"Yes, others like us," quipped Carl in an attempt to humor her, which successfully brought a smile upon her face.

"Thanks," she replied.

“Phyllis, not to nag or beat a dead horse, but you and Buck should try to drink some more blood ASAP, before they show up,” said Carl. “You’ll both need to be at the top of your games.”

“Agreed, and we still have some caribou blood left in the fridge at Buck’s cabin. After Buck returns, we’ll go drink up. But if we can’t make it, we always have you,” Phyllis said, laughing, in an attempt to re-humor him.

“And, I have returned,” said Buck as he walked back into the garage, holding a small wooden box. “We’re going to have to make this quick. As I was running back here from the store, I got a whiff of some vampire scents with a Western breeze in my face, meaning that they’re somewhere near the area already.”

“You can smell them?” asked a surprised Phyllis, while Carl rushed to the small garage windows with the shotgun, glancing outside and on the lookout for Titus.

“Yes, but that’s because of my sense of smell from my werewolf side,” he answered. “My guess is that our vampire sense of smell will become better for us both, with age and years.”

“What do you have in that box?” asked Brian. “Did you find any black powder and fuses?”

“Actually, I found something even better, more efficient, and easier to attach to the arrowheads, and probably just as effective,” he answered as he opened the wooden box with its ten, one-and-a-half-inch long, chubby, red-colored M-80 explosives stacked inside. “I had forgotten that I had these! These are the good firecrackers, too, with three to five grams of pyrotechnic flash powder inside each one, making them as potent as a quarter stick of dynamite, I was told. Glad I never fired them off and saved them for a rainy day.”

“Impressive!” exclaimed Carl with excitement as he gazed at the potent firecrackers inside the wooden box.

“I have five arrows attached to Ron’s bow, so I should be able to attach two M-80s to each side of the arrowheads, giving Titus double the pleasure,” said Buck. He walked over to Ron’s workbench and sat his compound bow down, while pulling some electrical black tape from the top shelf of the toolbox. “This should work,” he added as he began to tape the M-80s to each arrowhead, with the fuses facing backward, and taping them with rapid speed, completing all five arrows in less than thirty seconds.

“Wow! You’d be a handy mechanic,” said Carl. “Fastest service anywhere!”

“Unfortunately, I don’t know a thing about mechanics,” he answered. “It will be hard for Circa to find a replacement for Ron.”

“Buck, maybe we should quickly scurry down to your cabin and finish off the caribou blood in your fridge, before they show up,” said Phyllis.

“If Titus and his minions happen to show up before Phyllis and I return, do not attempt to engage them without our help, unless you have no choice,” said Buck to Carl and Brian. “You should be safe in here.”

“Fair enough,” replied Brian, as he and Carl began to double check that their weapons, ammunition, and hunting knives were accessible and ready for use, while Buck and Phyllis walked out the door to glance around before rushing to the cabin.

“Looks like Buck left the compound bow here for now, but at least Phyllis still

has the sword," said Brian. "Let's hope they don't have to use them yet."

"And let's hope we don't need to use ours yet," responded Carl.

"I just had a quick thought about something," Brian said.

"Hopefully, a helpful thought," Carl replied with a smirk on his face.

"Remember when Dietrich said, while he was trying to kill us, that wooden stakes wouldn't affect him?" asked Brian.

"How could I forget?" Carl answered.

"He didn't say anything about wooden stakes not having an effect on *all* vampires, or *lower-ranked* vampires like minions. He just said that stakes couldn't harm him."

"So it's still possible that stakes could kill his minions," surmised Carl.

"Possibly, but not a sure thing," Brian admitted.

"Well, I still got the four stakes that I made earlier, under the seat in my truck. Let's grab them and tuck them in behind our belts, just in case they do. All we can do is try them. No harm no foul," said Carl.

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CHAPTER 20

"Titus! Come take a look at this," exclaimed Lukas, one of Titus's minions, as he stood over the frozen caribou carcass on Buck's property, observing the multiple vampire puncture wounds in the neck of the caribou. Titus and his minions happened to wander into Buck's cabin accidentally while moving off road and toward Circa.

"It appears that we are close to Circa now," said Titus as he walked up to the frozen carcass near Lukas, while the other minions browsed the area. "What do we have here?" he asked himself in a low tone when he saw the puncture wounds in its neck.

"Do you think those were made by Dietrich?" asked Lukas. "Or could Dietrich have created some of his own minions also?"

"It's possible," he answered, "but creating minions wasn't Dietrich's cup of tea. He often found minions to be more annoying than helpful, and it would be considered rare for him to do so."

"Titus! Come take a look at this over here! I've never seen anything like this!" shouted a black minion named Angus, who was built like an athletic linebacker, standing near the woods.

Titus glanced over and was there in an instant, observing the many different kinds of tracks in the snow, but the tracks that Angus noticed stood out from the other tracks. "Intriguing!" he said as he gazed upon the combination of tracks, which were mostly human footprints mixed with the footprints of some kind of unknown beast.

"What do you think made those?" asked Angus.

Titus bent over to smell the tracks with his powerful sense of smell. "Very intriguing. I smell a combination of human and wolf scent everywhere, yet I see no wolf tracks."

Angus stood silent briefly before speaking. "Could there be some kind of lycanthrope in existence, if that's possible?" he asked. "Do you believe in those, or have you seen any?"

"Dietrich and I have both been on this Earth for a very long period of time, and if something like that exists, neither he nor I have seen one, nor heard of any existing other than in folklore stories," answered Titus. "It appears that we have some sort of mystery going on in this village, and I want bloody answers! I expect you four to be extra cautious when we invade Circa soon. Something unusual has happened here, and there could also be other rogue vampires in the area. Lukas, Simon, and Angus, I want you to go scout Circa by entering in from the highway, while Billie and I circle around and come in from the Yukon River."

"Yes, sir!" responded Simon, Lukas, and Angus to Titus's command.

“Before you leave, surround the cabin and glance through the windows to make sure no one is hiding inside,” said Titus. “I don’t hear any sign of life from within its walls now, but check it anyways. I don’t want anyone to escape this village alive.”

Buck and Phyllis were speeding down the trail that led to his cabin at supernatural speed, with his cabin just around a small corner and nearly in sight now, when Buck came to an abrupt stop, grabbing Phyllis hard in order to stop her also. Buck held his index finger up to his mouth, signaling Phyllis not to speak, while he quietly pulled her off to the side of the trail and into the trees, with both of them kneeling down, in a hiding position. Buck drew the word “vampires” into the snow with his index finger for Phyllis to read. They both quietly brushed some small branches and twigs aside with their hands in order to peek through and get a better view of his cabin. Phyllis’s face displayed an expression of grave concern as they saw one figure that looked like Dietrich, who was standing near the front door, and four other figures circling Buck’s cabin, in an attempt to peep through the two small windows on the front, along with the two windows in the rear. Phyllis pointed her index finger down to the snow and wrote out a message for Buck that read: *“How will we get to our blood now? And what if they have found out about us?”*

Buck replied back to her with another message in the snow that said: *“Let’s go back to the garage.”*

Phyllis seemed to happily agree with a nod of her head. Buck covered up the messages that they wrote in the snow before he and Phyllis quietly but speedily raced back down the trail and toward the garage.

“Listen!” said Titus, and he and his minions remained silent for a moment, trying to identify the noise that he heard. “I heard something down the trail! Simon, I want you to quickly investigate it before we advance with our previous plans, in case the noise was caused from something other than an animal.”

“Yes, sir!” responded the oldest minion, Simon, and he rushed down the trail, in search of any possible suspects or suspicious activity. He didn’t have to run far before he saw the fresh footprints of Buck’s and Phyllis’s in the snow, just off the trail entering into and exiting the trees, and stopped to inspect them. He followed their tracks into the trees, where the footprints ceased after a few feet and had a secret view of the cabin.

“What is it, Simon?” asked Titus as Simon walked back onto the trail.

“It looks like two people were just here, and they were watching us from the trees and left again,” answered Simon.

“Indeed?” asked Titus, and then he was at Simon’s side in a flash to inspect the footprints for himself. “It appears that our presence here is known. If whoever was in the truck that Thomas let escape didn’t warn Circa, then no doubt, whoever made these tracks will, as I’m positive that they’ll lead to somewhere in the village. And whoever made these footprints cannot be human if they easily avoided my detection of them, so use caution if you find them. Let’s proceed with our plan now!”

Simon, Lukas, and Angus sped down the trail toward the highway and into Circa, while Titus and Billie headed toward the Yukon River to approach from the

rear.

Buck and Phyllis ran back into the garage door, where Carl and Brian were waiting for them.

“Were you able to feed?” asked Brian.

“No, I’m afraid not,” answered Buck. “Titus and his minions were surrounding my cabin, and we couldn’t get anywhere near it. But Phyllis and I still feel strong and not weakened yet, at least.”

“Dang, they’re really close now!” replied Carl. “At least we still have about two hours of daylight left.”

“Did you guys say there were five minions?” asked Buck.

“Yes,” answered Brian. “Six total, counting Titus.

“It looks as if one of them is missing then, and could be anywhere. We only saw a total of five at my cabin,” said Buck, then he noticed the wooden stakes tucked behind Carl’s and Brian’s belts. “Will those kill them?”

“They won’t stop Titus, but there’s a possible chance they could stop his minions, but we’re not 100 percent sure about that,” answered Brian.

“They better be very sharp because all of them were wearing matching black leather similar to motorcycle racing leather, which is very difficult to penetrate. But let’s keep our fingers crossed and hope they do work on his minions. Stakes would give us all an advantage and make the fight less difficult, if so,” replied Buck, “especially for you two.”

“Easier for us is always better,” answered Carl as he began gazing out the front garage windows for any sign of the minions, and with his shotgun in a ready-to-fire position.

Brian and Phyllis stood guard at the windows on each of the side walls. Buck was putting his finishing touches on the compound bow, preparing it for rapid firing with practice drawing of its string and aiming at the walls, and at an imaginary Titus.

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CHAPTER 21

Titus and Billie were now walking down the Yukon River on frozen snowmobile trails, very close to the backside of Circa, 200 hundred yards from the backside of the clinic and its loading dock, when Titus stopped to gaze at an old, rustic, wooden hull-bucket-line gold dredge, frozen in time there since the early 1900s, and just twenty-five yards off the river and up its bank. He noticed several footprints entering and leaving the dredge, from and toward the backside of Circa.

"Dietrich!" exclaimed Titus.

"Excuse me, sir?" replied Billie.

"My destruction of Circa can wait for a moment, as I need to first investigate that gold dredge," said Titus as he ran to the dredge in seconds, soon after followed by Billie. "Dietrich was here. I can still smell the remnants of his scent and feel his presence," he told her. "I want you to continue on to Circa as planned, toward the others, while I stay here and investigate further."

"Yes, sir!" she responded before disappearing off to help Angus, Lukas, and Simon attack Circa and avenge the death of Dietrich for Titus.

Titus leaped onto the ten-foot high hull from the ground and walked through a large opening, about eight feet high and eight feet wide, and inside on the lower level of the huge, dark, and empty dredge, with his presence spooking a dozen pigeons, causing them to fly outside, while observing its giant-sized conveyor belt that was once used for separating gold from dirt, and several old metal spiral staircases that led to the upper levels. "Dietrich, my brother," he mumbled to himself in a low, sentimental tone as he observed his brother's previous activity there, and could seem to feel his presence also.

There was a dead, white as a ghost, blood-drained, and stiff carcass of a native female lady lying on the cold metal floor of the dredge, which Dietrich had fed upon. She was dressed in a white nurse's outfit and had a name tag pinned to her blouse, which read, "Shirley."

After further investigation of the inside of the dredge, Titus found a small notebook on a bench, which Dietrich had used as a small diary of his previous activity in Circa and had left it behind; whether on purpose or by accident was unknown to Titus. As he read through a few pages, he discovered that his brother was infatuated with a village girl in Circa named Phyllis, who he intended to turn into a vampire just two nights earlier, making her his eternal mate and minion in servitude to him for an eternity. As he read through more, he saw where Dietrich had written of two infidels named Carl and Brian, who Dietrich had suspected were attempting to hinder his plans for Phyllis, and one infidel named Ron, whom he killed, when Ron attempted to stop him from talking to Phyllis. And he read of Dietrich's abduction of the nurse, Shirley, from off the clinic's loading dock after she came outside to smoke a cigarette, and scurrying her to the dredge to feed

upon her, and how he was unable to learn what she knew about Circa, for her years of chain smoking had corrupted her blood.

Titus tucked the small notebook into the side pocket of his black leather suit. “Something tells me, if I find Phyllis and these other two infidels, I’ll get some answers!” he said to himself. “I promise you, my brother, that when I find them, drinking their blood will be too easy on them. But instead, they will be forced to talk! And if they had anything to do with your death, they will die a very slow, tortured, and agonizing death, along with their village being wiped off the face of the map!” he angrily exclaimed as he left the dredge.

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CHAPTER 22

Simon, Angus, and Lukas followed the footprints of Buck and Phyllis for as far as they could before their tracks faded away after crossing over the wooden bridge to enter Circa.

"Whoever made these tracks are definitely somewhere nearby in this village, and it shouldn't take us very long to locate them," said Simon.

"I want whoever ran over and escaped Thomas for myself!" exclaimed Angus. "I'll give them what's coming to them when I cripple them and run them down with their own truck!"

"Just let me take a quick drink from them first before you waste a good blood supply for us all," exclaimed Lukas.

"I'll do what I want with them," barked Angus as he shoved Lukas with supernatural power and speed up against the wooden guardrail on the left side of the bridge, causing that part of the guardrail's beam to snap and break.

Lukas quickly regrouped and responded by grabbing onto the leather over Angus's chest with both his hands, shoving him in return up against the guardrail on the right side of the bridge with such speed and force that it snapped and broke a truss, which nearly propelled Angus through the guardrail and off the side of the bridge. Angus quickly managed to grab onto a large splinter of wood from the broken truss, which resembled a sharp, pointed stake, and attempted to aggressively shove it through the chest and heart of Lukas in retaliation, trying to kill him in a fit of rage, while Lukas managed to block the forward swing of Angus's arm with his own arm, preventing him from doing so.

"Knock it off both of you, now!" shouted Simon to them as he jumped in between the two, attempting to separate them while also angrily displaying his fangs as a show of his authority. "Our fight is with whoever killed Dietrich and with Circa, and our goal is to kill them, not to kill each other! Save your strength for them, because something tells me that you're going to need it!"

Angus and Lukas immediately ceased their fight, and Angus tossed his stake over the side of the bridge and walked away from Lukas. "What is your plan now?" he asked Simon.

"We'll keep walking down the highway and through Circa, which shouldn't take long, and see if we'll notice any sign of activity inside one of these buildings," he answered. "It's still light outside, and it surprisingly looks and sounds unusually quiet here. I can't even hear any children playing outside."

"Maybe Titus and Billie will find someone to kill, or better yet, bring someone kicking and screaming for us to feed upon," replied Lukas. "When Titus is finished destroying this place, this village will be dead quiet."

"Did you hear something, Buck?" asked Phyllis, noticing that he had stopped

and stood motionless for the past minute, intently listening for something that even Phyllis herself didn't hear with her vampire's enhanced sense of hearing.

"I thought I heard some commotion, somewhere near the bridge, I believe, and it possibly could have been from them," answered Buck.

"Wow! That's around one-eighth of a mile away," Carl said. "Very impressive and no way will we ever talk behind your back."

"Buck's hybrid sense of hearing is twice as strong as mine," said Phyllis.

"We better take up our defensive positions now and assume they'll be here any moment," Buck said, glancing at his wristwatch, which read 4:30 PM. "It shouldn't take them long to spot us, as this should be the only building in the village with the inside lights on."

"Should we shut our lights off and try to hit them with a surprise attack?" Brian asked Buck.

"Normally, I'd agree to that as being a good idea, but I want them focused on us, so they won't notice and hurt anyone else in the village," answered Buck.

"Agreed," Brian said, thinking to himself how selfless Buck was and how he was willing to put himself in harm's way rather than chancing someone else from his village being harmed. He quietly opened the left-side wall window of the garage high enough for him to fire Ron's rifle out of, and had a decent sight radius and shooting distance of up to 100 yards.

Carl likewise opened the front window of the garage, to the right of the large bay door, high enough to easily take a snap shot out of with the shotgun, while Phyllis blew a kiss toward Buck and remained at the closed right-side wall window, watching and intently listening. Buck had his compound bow leaning in the front corner, near the main door, as he stationed himself at the opened front window to the left of the large bay door, watching, listening, and sniffing the air for their vampire scent.

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CHAPTER 23

Simon led the way as he, Lukas, and Angus continued down the small highway and through Circa from the front, while watching and listening for any sign of human life.

"There we go," said Simon as he noticed the red garage to his left with its inside lights on.

"Finally!" responded Angus with excitement.

"Just be cautious, you two! I wouldn't be surprised if it were some sort of trap, since it's the only building around with any sign of life. I'll approach from the front, and Lukas can circle around the right side, while you, Angus, can circle around the left side of the building," said Simon as the three of them slowly began to advance on Ron's garage in attack mode.

"Here they come!" exclaimed Buck to the others as he noticed three of them beginning to circle around the garage. "I thought I had gotten a whiff of their vampire scent, and it looks as if Titus and another minion are still missing, so everyone, keep your eyes peeled and watch your backs!"

Brian began to feel himself shake with nervousness as adrenaline began to pump through his body, speeding up his heart rate during the process.

"Are you going to be okay, Brian?" asked Phyllis with concern. "Believe it or not, I can hear your increased heart rate."

"I'll be okay in a minute after I take some deep breaths," he replied. "The last time I was this nervous and afraid was when, well, you know, when Buck's werewolf attacked us."

"Everything will be fine, Brian," responded Buck. "Phyllis and I will do most of the dirty work, and we got your back."

Brian nodded with approval to both Buck and Phyllis as he felt his nerves calm down again, and began focusing on the battle that was about to take place.

"If we make it through this unscathed, I'm going to tell everyone that I fought and survived the battle at Ron's garage!" said Carl with a chuckle, trying to humor himself.

"Hello!" shouted the blond-haired, muscular, white male minion from the front of the garage as he noticed Buck and Carl staring at him from inside and through the small front garage windows. "My name is Simon," continued the minion, who appeared to be the average height of a normal person, to Buck and Carl.

"What do you want?" Buck asked.

"My car broke down just down the highway near the bridge, and I was looking for a garage to help me, and I am very cold now! Could you please invite me inside, sir, or could you come outside and help me?"

"Is it just yourself?" Buck asked again.

“Just me, yes, but I have a wife and two children in my car waiting for help,” he answered.

“If that’s the case, then why are your two friends, whom you walked into the parking lot with, circling this garage as we speak?” asked Buck cleverly and with sarcasm. “You’re lying, so why don’t you tell me who you all are and the real reason why you’re here?”

Simon became instantly enraged and lost his poise. “Because we’re going to kill you. That is the reason why we are here! Come out now and I’ll introduce you to my other two friends, Lukas and Angus, and we’ll kill you swiftly, or choose to hide inside, and we will burn the building down, with you trapped inside, if necessary!”

Buck was starting to reply when he was interrupted by the screams of Phyllis, as Lukas had broken through and shattered the glass window where she stood, grabbing onto her with both his hands and forcefully pulling her outside in an instant, and slamming her to the ground. His surprise attack happened so quickly that Phyllis dropped her sword onto the garage floor during the process.

“Phyllis!” shouted Buck with alarm as he quickly ran outside through the main door to help her, but barely made it to the outside front of the garage when Simon leaped in front of him, grabbed him, and tossed him into the large front bay door of the garage, which put a giant-sized stress crack into it from top to bottom. Buck responded by kicking Simon in the chest with his right leg as he charged toward Buck, which propelled Simon through the air, crashing into the front grille of Carl’s truck, which was parked ten feet away. Simon charged at Buck again, which resulted in Buck scooping him up and slamming him hard onto his back on the ground.

Brian rushed over to the window where Phyllis was previously standing and picked up her sword from the floor. “Carl, you go help Buck and blast that Simon character!” he shouted. “And I’ll help Phyllis!” He glanced out of the broken window and saw that a tall and skinny white minion, with the physique of a basketball player, and with reddish-colored hair, had the stunned Phyllis pinned to the ground, and was sitting on top of her and straddling her, with his back turned toward the window and Brian.

“You’re really pretty,” said Lukas to the still semi-dazed Phyllis, and began to taunt her. “I’m not going to kill you just yet, but maybe I’ll have a little fun with you first!” He barely finished his demented taunting of Phyllis and was starting to stroke her hair when a loud noise erupted behind him from the garage window, and an intense, sharp pain flooded the back of his neck and head, which dazed him, blurred his vision, and nearly knocked him off Phyllis.

Brian had fired the.308 rifle from almost point-blank range into the back of Lukas’s neck before running toward the front-side main door with the rifle and sword to help her.

Phyllis had now fully recovered and responded with her own taunt, saying, “You’re really ugly,” before she managed to buck and kick Lukas on his back with her left knee with such extreme force that it propelled Lukas off her ten feet through the air, sending him crashing into a small patch of willows.

As Brian had made it outside and around the front corner, running toward

Phyllis, he saw that Buck was now preoccupied with fighting against two minions, as Angus had now joined the fight with Simon, while Carl was watching and looking for the right spot to fire the shotgun at one of the minions. Angus was on Buck's back, trying to bite into the side of his neck, when Buck grabbed him by the side of his head and ears, yanking him off his back and slamming him onto the hood of Carl's truck, buckling the hood with a giant-sized dent in the process. Buck didn't have a moment to enjoy his move before Simon was attacking him from the front again. Carl finally found the moment he had been waiting for, as he began firing the twelve-gauge shotgun into the chest of the minion named Angus from ten feet away, before Angus had a chance to leap onto Buck again.

"I'm sick and tired of vampires like you damaging my truck, you bastard!" shouted Carl at Angus as he fired the shotgun at him, pumped another shell into the chamber, and fired again, repeating the process five times before the shotgun was finally empty.

Angus slid off the hood and fell onto the ground, trying to recover from his weakened condition, but was severely wounded from the combination of the shotgun blast and from the wounds he received during his fight with Buck. He was in desperate need of blood to feed on. Angus struggled to move but also hoped to entice Carl into a sloppy, careless, and overconfident approach, getting close enough for him to counter attack Carl and drink his blood for instantaneous replenishing, healing, and strength.

But Carl wisely was cautious and kept his distance. "Now would be a good time to try this out and hope that it works," he said as he pulled one wooden stake out from his belt and, with great courage and bravado, leaped onto the minion, who was now reaching up and attempting to grab and bite him, anywhere that he could! Angus seemed to sense that his long time on earth was about to end, so with intimidating furor, he hissed loudly at him, while also revealing his terrifying and deadly fangs! He was intending to terrorize Carl with fear, but instead, he quickly thrust the sharp stake as hard as he could through the black leather that covered the chest of Angus, into the heart of the wounded vampire. The world seemed to stop for a moment, and Carl breathed a sigh of relief as he watched the face of Angus shrivel up into a decaying, wrinkled corpse, followed quickly by his body shriveling up, and then into dust, melting away into the snow. He was dead, but unfortunately for Carl, the stake had disappeared also, meaning that he was down to one stake left, with two minions presently attacking and a third one still missing somewhere, and possibly nearby. He began to reload his shotgun and saw that Buck had Simon pinned to the ground and was about to kill him by twisting his head off with his powerful hybrid hands.

"What are you?" Simon asked Buck, as he thought that his life was about to end. "You caught me off guard because I assumed you were human, but I'm 300 years old and you're stronger than me, which means you're either an older vampire or something else!"

Buck didn't think to respond before Lukas, who had now recovered after Brian's shot to the back of his neck, abandoned his attack on Phyllis and, instead, leaped onto Buck to help save Simon, knocking Buck off Simon and onto the ground. Lukas was on top of Buck in an instant, attempting to shove his right hand through Buck's chest and rip his heart out. When that failed, Lukas tried to snap

Buck's neck, but Buck managed to bite into his right arm, which caused Lukas tremendous pain and distracted him enough for Buck to grab on to his right arm and hurl him off, slamming him onto the ground hard enough to briefly knock the wind out of him.

Buck's beginning to slow down and will need blood, thought Carl to himself. *I better hurry up and blast and stake another one!* He had just loaded his last shotgun shell and began to ascend upon Lukas when he caught a blur from the corner of his right eye from a fast-approaching female, who hit him with extreme force, knocking the shotgun out of his hand, hurling him through the air and crashing hard into the front of the garage wall, causing him to black out.

Brian was already around the corner and checking on Phyllis, who seemed to be okay but just shaken up.

"I'm fine! We need to help Buck!" she shouted when she saw Buck fighting against two minions.

Brian handed her the sword and he readied the rifle as they both ran back out front to help Buck. When Brian rounded the corner, he saw another minion, a female vampire who looked like a petite Goth girl, with her short, thick, black hair, a gold earring in her left ear, and lots of dark eye shadow makeup on her white face. She was straddling Carl's unconscious body, revealing her fangs and seconds away from biting into his neck. He thought, *I hate to shoot a woman, but...* He fired the.308 rifle into her upper body, which momentarily knocked her off Carl.

"So you're the one who shot me from behind!" said Lukas as he raised himself up from the ground after Buck had slammed him down hard just seconds earlier, but was now occupied with fighting Simon again. "I owe you big time!"

Brian raised the rifle, pointed it toward Lukas, and squeezed the trigger. Click! The empty sound seemed as loud as cannons, when he realized that he had forgotten to chamber another round in the rifle after shooting the female minion just moments earlier.

Lukas had a big smirk on his face as he was about to pounce on Brian, when his smirk suddenly turned sideways as his head rolled off his body and to the ground, followed by his body collapsing in a pile and disintegrating into a corpse of dust.

"And I owe you big time also!" said Phyllis, who was standing just behind where Lukas was standing, with the sword held high in the air after just beheading Lukas with it.

"Sweet!" responded Brian as he gave Phyllis a high five with his right hand before chambering another round again, and looking toward Carl while Phyllis turned to look for Buck and Simon.

Billie, the female minion, had now entered the fight against Buck with Simon, and the two of them were beginning to gain an advantage over Buck, as he was now slowly wearing down from his constant and nonstop fighting against two minions. She was now kicking Buck in the ribs while Simon was punching him in the face. Phyllis rushed in and grabbed Billie, tossing her off Buck and into the side of Carl's truck, while Brian rushed over to help Carl, who was still on the ground and appeared to be fatally wounded. Phyllis kicked Simon from off Buck

and raised the sword up high. She was aiming its sharp blade in the direction of Simon's neck when Billie tackled her and took her to the ground, while also wrestling the sword from her hands and away from her.

"Carl! Carl!" shouted Brian as he shook Carl. "Are you hurt bad?"

"I think my ribs are all broken, and it hurts badly!" answered Carl weakly as he coughed up and spat out blood.

Brian now knew that Carl was in serious trouble, when he saw that a big splinter of wood from the garage, which had broken off when he was thrown into it, had punctured through his upper back and into his right lung, and he appeared to be bleeding internally and would die if he did not receive immediate medical attention. "You're going to be okay, Carl! I'll take you to the clinic and try to patch you up there, and call for a helicopter from Fairville!" he said with desperation.

"No!" answered Carl with anger. "Just look at Buck and Phyllis, Brian! They're getting weaker by the moment and Titus hasn't even shown his ugly face yet. They need my help!"

"You're help? How are you going to fight in your condition?" asked Brian with frustration. "You're dying!"

"I'm not talking about fighting. I'm talking about letting them both drink as much of my blood as they need to in order to save Circa and everyone else, and kill Titus, even if they need all of my blood!"

Brian remained silent with the words that Carl said, not liking anything that he was hearing from him, but knew deep down inside that he was right. There was a strong chance that Carl might not even make it back to Fairville alive in his condition, and that his blood could be the best hope for Buck's and Phyllis's survival.

"Just tell my family that I loved them very much, and that I died a hero," said Carl as his eyes began to water up with tears. "Make up some story, like I tried to save a kid on the Yukon River who fell through a soft spot on the ice, over fast current, and I myself fell through the ice and disappeared, being sucked under and downriver. And make sure that I am cremated here in Circa, so no one can ever discover the truth about this place or learn of its secrets," he added weakly as he coughed up more blood.

Brian despondently looked over toward Phyllis and saw the female minion, Billie, on top of her, holding the sword's sharp blade against her throat while questioning her, while the worn-out Buck was trying to regain an advantage over Simon again, who himself was becoming worn-out also. Brian pulled the remaining wooden stake from Carl's belt and placed it into his hand. "If any other vampire other than Buck or Phyllis tries to drink your blood, stake them!" he demanded as he jumped up to try and determine who needed help more between Phyllis and Buck.

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CHAPTER 24

Billie held the sword's blade to Phyllis's throat and demanded to know who and what she was.

"I'm a vampire just like you," she told her. "I was turned by Dietrich, as he wanted to take me away by force and make me his mate, forcing me into a life of servitude to him for as long as he wanted me, but I resisted!"

"That's impossible!" responded Billie. "No one can break the power of their control!"

"I did, and you can also, and I promise that I will help you! My name is Phyllis. What is your name?"

"My name is Billie, and if what you're saying is true, there's nothing more that I would want than to be free from Titus! But I'm Titus's mate and it's the only life I know now. I haven't been free for a very long time, since when I was human, a life that is only a cloudy past now, and everyone from that time has long since passed."

"Trust me to help you, Billie. I want to help you! I would love to have another female friend who is a vampire also," said Phyllis to her, trying her best to persuade her. "We could be friends forever."

"Titus will kill me if I try," replied Billie. "He killed his previous mate who came before me, after he became bored with her and wanted me more, and he can't be stopped!"

"Dietrich wanted to kill my friends for resisting also, but we killed him together as a team! Help us kill Titus!" Phyllis pleaded, as she remained silent, in deep thought, trying to summon the courage from within herself to resist Titus.

Brian saw that Phyllis was engaged in conversation with the female minion, so he rushed over to help Buck instead. But his help wasn't needed, as Buck had regained an advantage on Simon and the werewolf side of his hybrid nature reacted by biting Simon's throat, ripping out his jugular vein and fatally wounding him. Buck staggered to his feet, nearly exhausted, and looked at Phyllis, who still had Billie on top of her.

"Yes, I want to help you and be free from Titus!" said Billie after a long pause, and she stood up with the sword still in her hand and walked over to the fatally wounded Simon.

"Help me, Billie," pleaded Simon to her as she stood over his body. "Kill them as Titus has commanded!"

"Screw Titus!" she shouted. "I want to be free like her, like Phyllis, who wants to be my friend, and the only one who I will kill now is you!" She raised the sword up and swung down hard onto Simon's neck, beheading him with its sharp blade. She dropped the sword as Phyllis walked over to her and gave her a comforting

hug of love and friendship, which caused her to begin crying, as her hardened heart from years of violence began to soften, while Simon shriveled up into a rapidly decaying corpse. “I haven’t had a hug from someone who cared about me since I was human,” she said, feeling helpless to fight off the new, overwhelming emotions of joy that flooded her vampire senses.

“Pardon me?” questioned a voice from twenty yards away, as a figure of a man walking toward them emerged from the shadows. “Have I not loved you and given you everything that you’ve wanted, Billie?”

Billie gasped with fear. “It’s Titus!” she whispered to Phyllis.

Phyllis and Buck turned to look upon him as he approached, while Brian snuck inside the garage to retrieve the compound bow with its M-80s strapped to the front. The man who was walking toward them, who was also dressed in black leather, looked identical to Dietrich in all aspects, with the exception of Titus having six fingers on each of his hands instead of five fingers, as Dietrich had.

“What have you done, Billie?” Titus asked her with anger in his voice as he saw the dust residue lying on the ground from the decayed corpses of Simon, Lukas, and Angus. “Your friends fight to the death for me, while you turn your back on them and me. You betray us and want to become friends with them now? You should be either dead yourself now or fighting to the death, but this is unacceptable!”

“They weren’t my friends, and you don’t care about us. You only create minions and mates to use until you become bored with them. You would have eventually killed us off anyways!” barked an angry, emotional response from Billie to Titus. “I don’t want to be your slave any longer. I want to be her friend!” she said as she looked at Phyllis.

“And who is she?” asked Titus with anger and frustration.

“My name is Phyllis,” she answered him. “I was supposed to be your brother’s mate until I resisted him and helped kill him!”

“Yes, and I helped kill him also!” barked Buck to Titus. “Dietrich was his name, I believe.”

Titus became furious. “Billie, come stand at my side and fight with me now, or die with them! What will you choose, Billie, life or death?”

Billie summoned up every ounce of courage and determination from within herself to resist him as Phyllis held her hand. “I choose to resist you, Titus!”

“Don’t forget me, either!” shouted a voice from the front of the garage. “I helped kill your pathetic brother also!” It was Brian, holding the compound bow fully drawn and aimed toward Titus after he had already lit the fuses on the M-80s seconds earlier. He released the string of the bow, and the arrow, with its explosives attached to the head, flew fast toward Titus’s chest. But his heart sank when Titus easily plucked the arrow in midair, ran over to Billie in a blur, and shoved the arrow with its explosives deep through her left breast and ribcage, into her heart, and tossed her with his left arm twenty feet through the air like a rag doll. Her body exploded into many pieces before she hit the ground.

“Noooooo!” screamed Phyllis as she watched her new friend nearly disintegrate into thin air, vanishing before her eyes, and her only crime was that she wanted to be free from the evil tyrant Titus, and wanted Phyllis’s friendship.

Buck was shocked at the coldness and evilness of Titus, which could only have been rivaled by his former brother Dietrich.

Titus grabbed Phyllis by the hair of her head, forcing her to look at him as he gazed into her eyes. “Now, what should I do with you?” he asked her. “Kill you or force you to take Billie’s place as my new mate?”

“Never!” shouted Phyllis as she kicked Titus in the groin as hard as she could while Buck had already leaped onto his back from behind, attempting to put him into a rear choke hold. Their defensive moves seemed to have little effect on Titus as he backhanded Phyllis across the face and threw Buck off his back simultaneously, which hurled them both through the air, smacking hard high up on the front of the garage wall, where they crash-landed beside Carl, who was nearly dead now.

“Buck and Phyllis, feed on me, take all of my blood, and kill that bastard!” pleaded Carl to them in soft words, which he struggled to force out, and was almost unable to talk now. They looked at Carl as he was now minutes away from death from his wounds.

“Oh, Carl, we’re so sorry,” said Phyllis in soft words as she caressed his face while Buck somberly watched.

“No time for sympathy or chitty chat now. Feed on me before it’s too late!” responded Carl with desperation.

Phyllis and Buck looked at Brian, and he nodded his head up and down, giving them his approval.

“You two feed now, and I’ll hold him off until you’re finished,” said Brian as he had leaned the compound bow against the front of the garage and grabbed Ron’s rifle again.

Titus began to advance on them when he smelled Carl’s blood, but Brian cut him off, trying to stop him by firing one bullet after another into Titus’s head from ten yards away, which momentarily halted his progress.

“I love you all,” said Carl to Phyllis, Buck, and Brian before fading away into unconsciousness as Phyllis and Buck sadly and reluctantly, with tears in their eyes, slipped both of their fangs into the right and left wrists of Carl, one on each side, and began to feed on his blood.

As Phyllis and Buck fed, they could feel an overwhelming feeling of rejuvenation, energy, and power fuel their weakened bodies again, and the feeding process was now returning all their strength and power, even more so than before, as they had not previously drank a large quantity of blood, especially human blood, since they became vampires. Brian had just fired his last shot at Titus as Buck and Phyllis finished feeding. Brian looked at Carl, who was now dead, and pale white, from being drained of all his blood.

“Rest in peace, Grizz. Rest in peace, my friend,” mumbled Brian sadly to himself as he laid the empty rifle down and grabbed the loaded shotgun from off the ground to use instead, which Carl had previously dropped when he was attacked by Billie.

Buck grabbed the compound bow, placed another arrow in the string, lit the fuses with his cigarette lighter, and let it fly while Titus was temporarily distracted by blurry vision from the gunshot wounds he received from Brian, and Phyllis

scanned the ground for the sword that Billie had dropped. Titus's vision had finally cleared again after being shot in his head five times by Brian, but not soon enough to see and stop the explosive arrow from penetrating his leather suit and into his chest. The explosion of the two M-80s knocked Titus backward several feet onto the ground and on his back, causing him to gasp for his breath as the explosion seemed to only stun and not kill him. Titus barely had time to recover and attempted to stagger up onto his feet again, when two more arrows smacked him in the chest, just seconds apart from each other. Titus was too late with his attempt to yank them out, and the explosion of four M-80s going off nearly at once inside his chest was almost too much for even him and his great supernatural power to protect his life, as it hurled him through the air and crash-landed onto his back fifteen yards away from Buck, who was the nearest, and lay motionless from his blacking out into unconsciousness.

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CHAPTER 25

"I've got one arrow left," said Buck as he set the bow down and cautiously walked toward the body of Titus, which lay on the ground, but stuffed the last explosive arrow and lighter into his back pocket, where he could easily grab them if needed.

"Be careful, Buck," warned Brian to him. "I've seen this before with Dietrich, and I'll be shocked if he's dead! Them SOBs don't die easily!"

"I found it!" said Phyllis as she saw the sword lying in the snow and picked it up.

"Take these also, Phyllis, just in case Dietrich was lying to Carl and me when he said these were useless against him," said Brian as he tossed her the two wooden stakes that he still had tucked behind his belt. "I'll blast Titus with the shotgun if I even see a muscle twitch from him," he added as he slowly walked past Buck while aiming the twelve gauge at Titus's body. "It might not kill him, but if anything, it should weaken him some more, as our shots had done with Dietrich."

"Careful, Brian," said Phyllis as Brian was just a few feet from Titus's body now, but stopped and readied himself into a shooting stance, aiming the front bead sight of the shotgun onto Titus's chest. Phyllis began to move in closer with the sword also, gripping it tightly and deciding that now would be the best time to attempt to behead Titus.

Buck was also close, near the feet of Titus, and ready to pounce on him if necessary, if he suddenly awoke and attacked the others. The three of them stared momentarily at Titus's motionless body, lying face up on the ground, eyes closed, and seemingly appearing dead already.

"I'm sure he can't be dead this quickly or easily, so let me gladly finish the deal with an extra insurance policy!" exclaimed Phyllis as she raised the sword high above her head and swung its blade down hard and with all her might onto Titus's throat. She, Buck, and Brian all stood in stunned disbelief and silence as the head of Titus still remained intact on his body, and the sharp, solid blade of the sword was unable to penetrate the skin tissue on his throat, but instead bent and broke in half, and was now unusable.

"What in the hell?" mumbled the surprised Buck in disbelief.

"Why didn't it work?" asked Phyllis with anxiety.

"Because I'm too strong and powerful, and cannot be killed!" exclaimed Titus as he leaped back up onto his feet in an instant, and had a furious look on his face. "Now, who wants to tell me what happened to my brother Dietrich, who is responsible for his death, and possibly spare his or her own life by doing so?!" he angrily asked them, while Buck, Brian, and Phyllis stood gazing at Titus with wide

eyes, unable to speak or move.

“Watch out, you two!” shouted Brian as he surprisingly was the first to respond to Titus by attempting to fire into his chest with the shotgun from point-blank range.

Titus knocked the shotgun from the tight-gripping hands of Brian so quickly that it broke the index and trigger fingers on his right hand during the process. Titus next clamped firmly onto Brian’s throat with his right hand and easily lifted him off the ground in an aggressive, threatening manner, which left Brian hanging in the air, struggling and kicking. But the vampire still had a light enough grip as to allow Brian to barely breathe and plead for his life. “Now, I’ll ask you all again! Who is responsible for the death of my brother? Or I’ll kill this man in a millisecond before any of you can even blink an eye!” he commanded in a loud voice.

Phyllis began to feel herself tremble as she was having flashbacks of her and Ron’s encounter with Dietrich in the store, when Dietrich killed Ron in the same manner.

“Please don’t kill me,” pleaded Brian to Titus, half choking and gasping for air, although knowing deep down inside that his pleas for mercy were most likely in vain.

“I did it!” responded Buck to Titus’s threats. “I killed you’re brother! Please let my friend go, as your fight is with me and with me only!”

“I find it very difficult to believe that you could have killed my brother,” Titus told Buck. “And I’m especially sure that you didn’t act alone, as it would have required more than one of you to gain an advantage over him.”

“I just shot and nearly killed you with my explosive arrows, didn’t I?” replied Buck sarcastically.

“And for that, I will be taking my time when I kill you lastly, ripping you slowly apart, piece by piece, so that it takes at least one day for you to die, and you’ll experience agony like you have never felt before,” answered Titus.

“I helped kill him also! We both killed him together! Can you please let him let him go and let us take his place?” pleaded Phyllis as she noticed that Brian appeared to be experiencing torturous pain by his distressed facial expressions.

“Are you two trying to mock me?” snapped Titus with anger and agitation. “You helped also? You’re just a pretty little vampire girl who could never help to kill my brother. This, I am sure! Now, one last time, or I’ll tighten my grip and kill your friend! How did you kill Dietrich? There is something that you’re not telling me. I want to know what it is, and my patience is nearing the end!”

“Okay, okay, I’ll tell you what happened!” responded Buck.

“Don’t tell him a thing, Buck!” gasped Brian with concern. “Let him kill me instead!”

Titus tightened his grip a little tighter on Brian’s throat, enough so that Brian could no longer speak.

“It wasn’t exactly me who killed your brother, but it was a beast from within me, or inside of me, that came out under a full moon and killed Dietrich,” Buck told their tormentor.

Titus released his grip on Brian’s throat, allowing him to live for the moment as

he fell to the ground. “Please explain,” he responded, who seemed to go from anger to curiosity in an instant.

Phyllis felt helpless to help as she listened to Buck’s report to Titus, and for now was just glad that Brian had been released and was okay.

“Every month, during the nights of the full moon cycle, I turn into a beast that some would call a werewolf, and my beast is what killed your brother,” said Buck to Titus, telling him about his werewolf, but unwilling to tell him that he was now a hybrid. He hoped to find wisdom as to the perfect time when to attack Titus, and signaled for Brian with his index finger to slowly move away from Titus while he had him distracted with conversation.

“Are you telling me that you’re a lycanthrope?” asked Titus with excitement. “Fascinating! My minions, whom you killed, and myself, spotted some animal tracks of an unknown origin near a small cabin, which seemed to transform from the tracks of a beast into the tracks of a barefooted human! By chance, were those tracks yours?”

“Yes!” answered Buck, who was now beginning to become weary of his questions.

“How did you come to be such a remarkable creature and killing machine, and are there more of you?” asked Titus. “Neither Dietrich or myself have ever seen one!”

“I doubt that any other werewolves exist, unless your brother unknowingly created more, as he had with me,” answered Buck.

“You’re saying that Dietrich created you? Explain!” demanded Titus.

“Your brother couldn’t finish the job on a wolf, which he started, and the wolf escaped him, and bit and infected me with his and your nauseating full moon curse virus!” snapped Buck as he was becoming more annoyed with being questioned, but also wanted to cease his questions before his hybrid secret risked being exposed. “Now, can we please stop the questions and just get on with the show?” he demanded, as he noticed that Brian had now moved a safer distance from Titus, while also managing to grab the shotgun again.

Titus’s facial expression went from curiosity back to anger again because of Buck’s remarks. “What to do with you?” he questioned aloud. “It will be dark in roughly thirty minutes, but the last full moon of the month is still a few hours away. Do I take you away by force, lock you inside a cage, and make you my guard dog and pet after I force you to watch your friend and girlfriend die? Do I just kill you and your friend now and, instead, take your pretty little girlfriend away with me by force, or do I just kill you all now, then burn down your village before I leave? Obviously, I don’t want to hang around until the full moon and watch you turn before I kill your beast, as it would seem to be risky for me, as it was with Dietrich.” He was enjoying his intimidating style of questioning himself with their certain deaths, attempting to also cause them more anguish and mental suffering before he killed them. “I know what to do!” he exclaimed with excitement. “It seems that I now know how to create my own lycanthrope, as I will just find some wolves to bite and infect tonight during the full moon, release them into your village to bite and infect whoever returns here, and then take them away by force, cage them, and make them my pets! That, of course, will be done after I

first kill you all!”

Buck felt himself become very angry with Titus’s threats to turn someone else from his village into the horrific werewolf beast that he had become, which had caused him so much grief, pain, and anguish. And the threat of his village friends becoming werewolves, along with being caged by Titus for entertainment purposes, was totally unacceptable. Buck now regretted telling Titus about his werewolf and knew that his new evil plan made it even more crucial to kill the older vampire. “I’ve got a much better option for you!” he replied to Titus’s threats. “I’m going to kill you now, so that you, with your wild and psychotic ideas, will never put anyone in harm’s way ever again, and you will join your wicked brother in Hell tonight!”

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CHAPTER 26

"Indeed?" responded Titus, as Buck nodded his head at Brian, giving him the signal to shoot, while also winking at Phyllis, signaling her that he was going to make his move. "And without your lycanthrope to aid in your fight, I must say that your foolish courageousness is what will be your downfall!"

Brian had to use his middle finger to squeeze the trigger of the shotgun, as he was unable to move his broken and painful index finger, then he fired it into the right side of Titus from a short distance away. The buckshot barely nudged Titus as it sprayed him in the right arm, and caused the ancient vampire to glare at him with an evil look of hatred.

"I should have killed you!" barked Titus as he turned toward Brian, but not before Phyllis was in front of him, thrusting both of her wooden stakes into his heart at once, which did cause him some pain and discomfort, but did not kill him. He was becoming furious now with their attacks and clamped his left hand with its six fingers around the back of Phyllis's neck and slammed her head into his chest with such force that it nearly knocked her out cold, and she fell backward to the ground from being dazed. "I'm going to save you and my best for last!" he told her in order to torment her.

"No!" yelled Buck angrily in response as he dove hard into Titus, put him into a bear hug, lifted him up from off the ground, and slammed him down hard and onto his back. Buck was on Titus in an instant and began punching him in the face several times with both fists, which seemed to surprise and hurt Titus much more than Titus could have expected, but also further enraged him.

Titus aggressively responded and backhanded Buck with his left hand from the ground with such power that it propelled Buck off him, throwing him several feet through the air. Buck crashed hard into the ground and struggled to collect himself, as his head was spinning from the hardest backhand that he had ever felt.

Titus was back on his feet again, and the enraged and powerful vampire put on a shocking display and frightful show for them that none of them could believe with their eyes. Titus's head and face began to contort, twist, and reshape into a hideous-looking creature with pointed bats ears, yellow eyes, brown hair, black nose, and fangs, along with his body also convulsing, as immense, membranous type, bat's wings sprung from his back, with intimidating features like shafts, barbs and razor sharp tips, which tore through his leather suit with ease, and long talons protruded from his twelve fingers. Titus was enraged, screeching with anger and displeasure as he pulled the two wooden stakes from out of his own chest. "I'm going to ram these stakes through the two of you so hard, it will rip your hearts out through your backs!" he said as he glared at Buck and Phyllis.

"He's even more menacing than Dietrich!" Brian said with extreme fright. "How is that possible since they were twins?"

“Because I was the firstborn, the first to be bitten, and sustained many more vampire bat bites than my brother had sustained on the night of our wonderful transformations!” responded the enraged Titus. “Now I command you to die!” He began to flap his wings, which lifted him off the ground and into flight while Phyllis, Buck, and Brian stared upward in horror.

Brian’s look of disbelief quickly changed to a look of fear that was followed by trembling, as Titus was flying toward him, with his piercing yellow eyes affixed onto him, which cut through him like a hot knife through butter. He quickly raised the shotgun up again, aimed it at Titus’s wings, and fired the remaining shotgun shells, which were loaded with buckshot, hoping to at least remove his ability to fly and to cripple him. His plan appeared to be working, as Titus began to flutter around in the air, struggling to maintain altitude as he fell back toward the Earth again.

Buck seized the moment and quickly leaped high into the air and onto the back of Titus, after summoning all of his inner strength from the combined species that hid inside of him. “I don’t know what’s worse, you flapping your gums or you flapping your wings!” he yelled as he grabbed onto the base of each giant bat wings with both his hands, which were rooted deep inside the Titus’s back, and pulled as hard as he could, ripping them from his back, causing Titus and him to crash to the ground together in a heap, rolling over and over and finally coming to a stop with Titus on top of Buck.

Titus was wounded and felt extreme pain like never before, and he seemed to finally be weakening, making him slightly more vulnerable. But he was still powerful, dangerous, deadly, and very angry, similar to a wounded tiger or bear, and now had Buck in a vulnerable position. Buck gasped in pain and struggled to remain conscious as Titus clamped his left fingers tightly around his throat, slamming his head up and down three times into the ground before holding and pinning him down by the throat, while shoving his right hand and forearm into and through his stomach, wrapping his fingers around his spine, ready to yank it out, as he had previously done to kill his minion, Thomas.

“What are you?” asked Titus. “Speak now or lose your spine and life! The full moon hasn’t arrived just yet, so your lycanthrope hasn’t appeared yet, and you’re much too strong to be just a new vampire, so tell me, where does your strength come from?”

The fidgety Buck was trying to reposition himself, attempting to ease his pain and also hoping to quickly counterattack before Titus killed him. He was determined to die before giving up his hybrid secret to Titus, which would most likely encourage him to also create hybrids, along with more werewolves and vampire minions. Such a force in the wrong hands like Titus’s would be unstoppable and a serious threat to all humankind.

“He gets his strength from love and from his friends!” shouted Phyllis with anger as she leaped onto Titus’s back from behind, and as fast as she could, which was enough to knock the surprised Titus off Buck again, helping to save him. She now had Titus in a rear choke hold and bit into the right side of his neck in the same manner as she had done with Dietrich, beginning to feed on his blood, drinking and gulping as quickly as possible, hoping to weaken him, while also wanting to strengthen herself.

“Get off me, you little wench!” shouted the furious Titus as he jumped back up with Phyllis clutched to his back and began to grab her head with his hands, wanting to snap and break her neck with a powerful twist of his wrist.

“Let’s see how you like this!” shouted Buck as he appeared in front of Titus within a split second, thrusting his own powerful right hand and forearm into and through the stomach of the ancient vampire, and clamping his own fingers firmly around Titus’s spine.

Titus responded by successfully knocking Buck away from him with a right elbow cross to Buck’s face, which nearly broke and fractured Buck’s jaw and skull, and sent him spiraling backward. But the move also backfired on Titus and proved to be costly for him, as the grip from Buck’s hand and fingers were strong enough to also pull and bring a chunk of Titus’s spine back out through his stomach during the process of being knocked backward to the ground. Buck shook his head from side to side, and opened and closed his mouth several times while trying to clear his vision again, and see if his jaws still functioned after the vicious right elbow. He noticed that he had a chunk of broken-off spine in his right hand that belonged to Titus, who was several feet away and slumping to his knees, and then to the ground, as Phyllis released her blood drinking, rear choke hold from Titus and cautiously backed a few feet away from him. Phyllis wiped the bloodstains from her mouth with the shirt sleeve on her right arm and felt tremendous satisfaction when she saw that Titus could only move his arms but not his legs, and was severely weakened by his blood loss from her feeding, as well as fatally wounded from a missing chunk of his spine that lay in Buck’s hand.

“Stay back, Brian!” said Phyllis to him when she saw him approaching Titus. “All he has to do is drink your blood and he’ll be miraculously healed and powerful again in a mere minute!”

“Gladly,” replied Brian as he kept a safe distance and watched.

“Give me your friend Brian’s blood to drink, and I promise that I’ll leave here and never come back again,” pleaded the wounded Titus.

“Rot in Hell!” barked Phyllis in response to him. “How many people have pleaded with you for their lives, only to be cruelly killed by you after, and now you have the audacity to plead to us for help?!”

“Well then, if I can’t drink his blood, then I’ll have to drink yours instead!” replied Titus angrily as he clamped onto the left leg of Phyllis with his powerful right hand, yanked her off her feet, and dragged her near his side. “Give me my blood back, wench!” he exclaimed as he bit into her left upper thigh with his fangs and began to feed, slowly draining Phyllis of her blood and strength, but in return, also began to slowly rejuvenate him with healing power and strength during his feeding process.

“No!” screamed Phyllis loudly and tried to free herself by punching Titus in the face and kicking him with her freed right leg, but her desperate resistance was unsuccessful.

“I now command you to die!” shouted Buck, who was now furious with Titus and wanted desperately to kill him. His rage seemed to somehow trigger his werewolf side, and his upper body suddenly begun to rip through his flannel shirt as his rapidly enlarging pectorals, deltoids, biceps, and triceps, covered with

brown hair, tore out and emerged. His face remained in its human form, but his eyes turned red and long claws grew from his brown, hairy fingertips, as he pulled the last explosive arrow and lighter from his rear pants pocket, lit the fuse, and leaped onto Titus, forcing his jaws open and yanking Titus's head and mouth from the thigh of Phyllis with such force that it snapped his neck. Titus glared at Buck, who was straddling him, as he helplessly watched Buck shove the lit explosive arrowhead deep into his mouth with extreme force, pinning his head to the ground, then the arrowhead went all the way through and out the rear of his skull, wedging deep into the frozen ground. "By the way, I'm a hybrid!" shouted Buck as he leaped off Titus, grabbed Phyllis's right hand, and quickly rushed both of them to a safe distance away from Titus's soon-to-be-exploding head.

Titus desperately tried to yank the arrow back out, but it was too late.

Brian quickly turned his head and eyes away from Titus, not wanting to see the gruesome sight as he heard the arrow explode. When he reluctantly turned his eyes back toward Titus, he shouted with excitement when he saw just the headless body of Titus lying in the snow. "Yes!" he exclaimed with excitement as he began to dance around in the snow as if he just scored a touchdown and was doing a victory celebration that would have landed him a fifteen-yard penalty in a football game. "Halleluiah, the wicked witch is dead," he added as he ran over to celebrate with Buck and Phyllis, who were now engaged in a deep, romantic kiss and hug.

Buck shook Brian's hand and told him, "Great work, Brian!"

"Yes, thank you!" added Phyllis as she gave Brian a big hug of celebration.

"Thank me?" he asked with marvel. "I want to thank you two, as you both did all of the dirty work, and the hardest part!"

"We were a good team, and it took all of our efforts, working together to kill Titus, just like with Dietrich," replied Buck to Brian.

"And especially Carl," added Phyllis. "If he wasn't willing to give us his blood, I'm positive that we'd all be dead now! We desperately needed to feed at that time, to continue on with the fight and defeat Titus."

"Carl died a hero," replied Brian with sadness. "And I'm not quite sure how to break the news to his wife Jessica and daughter Cindy. I was thinking of going with Carl's plan of telling them that he tried to save a village child on the Yukon River, who was falling through thin ice, but fell through himself after saving the child, and disappeared underneath and was swept downriver. Whatever story I come up with, they'll both be demoralized."

"I'm sorry about Carl, and sorry for his family," replied Phyllis.

"And I'm sorry about your friend Ron also," Back said.

"Everyone from our village should be coming back tomorrow, and Phyllis and I plan on holding a village memorial service for Ron at the school on Tuesday, and we'd love to include Carl in our service also, if that is acceptable with you," Buck told Brian. "Ron will most likely be cremated later in the week by the village elders, and if you think Carl should be cremated with him, I could tell the elders when they arrive, and they easily could at that time also."

"I would like that very much," answered Brian. "And I know that Carl would like and want that as well. Speaking of cremation, I better burn Titus's body to ashes now."

“I approve of that idea!” replied Buck as he tossed his lighter to Brian.

“Buck?” Phyllis said, curious about something that was on her mind, as Buck turned to look at her. “Before you pulled Titus off my leg, you partially transformed into your werewolf, but not fully transformed. Do you know why that happened? The full moon is still around two and a half hours away, and when you previously used thoughts to attempt turning without the full moon’s help, you were unsuccessful. Only with the full moon were you able to transform, but it appeared as if you were trying to transform before you saved me.”

“I’m not sure what happened really,” Buck answered. “I became really angry, and I did think about turning a little, but I was mostly just very angry and wanted to kill him.”

“Maybe with anger or rage, your werewolf side kicks in, or becomes the dominant side. Your rage could have also been partially fueled by your werewolf, and normally, you might be at a fifty-fifty split, but when you become enraged, your werewolf becomes dominant, especially since you were first a werewolf. Or maybe your werewolf is always the more dominant side, but I can’t really claim to be an expert when it comes to that,” said Brian with a chuckle.

“It’s something that I need to keep in mind, and I’ll need to watch my temper in the future, just in case,” replied Buck.

Brian retrieved a can of aerosol starter fluid from the garage, which Ron had on his bench, and used to spray into the carburetors on vehicles’ engines, which wouldn’t start in cold weather. He unzipped the black leather suit covering the headless body of Titus and sprayed the whole can all over his lifeless body. “This is for Carl!” he said as he lit the aerosol-soaked body of Titus with the lighter and stepped back. He, Buck, and Phyllis smiled with happiness while watching the flames erupt all over Titus, slowly burning him to ashes and melting into the snow. The daylight was now gone and the night’s darkness greeted them.

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CHAPTER 27

"I'm going to sleep well tonight, throbbing index finger or not," said Brian as he wiggled his fingers in an attempt to ease the pain. "Hopefully, the summit's highway will be cleared again by Tuesday, so I can head back after the memorial service. And with any luck, Circa has phone service again really soon, so I can call Nancy."

"Here are the keys again for the bed and breakfast cottage," said Phyllis before gently tossing them through the air and into the waiting hands of Brian. "Just lock them inside the building when you leave. My uncle will return later tomorrow, and he'll have his own keys to the cottage."

"Thank you again, and I'll take Carl's body over to the clinic and put him with Ron, wrap up my broken finger, then call it a night. I'll see you both sometime tomorrow," responded Brian before loading Carl's body into the back of the truck and driving off.

"I wonder if all the vampires are dead now, and if we're the only supernatural vampire-type beings left," Phyllis told Buck.

"Almost makes you feel a little lonely when thinking that's a possibility," answered Buck before putting his right arm around her shoulders. They walked toward his cabin together. "But it's possible that more of Titus's minions could be left in Europe, or possibly anywhere, now that Titus is dead."

"If so, I hope they quickly become like Billie wanted to become, and appreciate their freedom and use it for good deeds now, while also making friends and not continuing on with the evil lifestyle that Titus forced them into," she replied. "And I hope they don't suffer in a hopeless condition of loneliness."

"It may be difficult for some, if they still exist, since that is the only lifestyle they've ever known since becoming vampires." replied Buck. "Whatever happens with them if any are left, I consider myself very grateful to have you by my side. I wouldn't know what I would do without you."

"Aw, that's so sweet, Buck," responded Phyllis before kissing him and snuggling close to his warm body.

"In the morning, I'll put notices on the doors of every house in Circa, telling them about the memorial service for Ron and Carl on Tuesday, as everyone should be back by then. And I'll also mention that my werewolf threat is now over, so that no one will have to leave the village during the monthly full moon cycles again."

"Will you tell them that you're a hybrid now? And will you tell them that I'm a vampire also?" she asked.

"I couldn't stand the possibility of your friends suddenly becoming afraid of you if they heard that you were a vampire now, so I think it's best if I lie and tell

everyone that I've been cured from the werewolf curse, and everything is normal again," he answered. "They may never trust us, and possibly even avoid us, and we'll both feel alone, like you originally feared."

"Do you think that is fair to them?" she asked. "Maybe they deserve the truth and then let them decide for themselves as to how they will react toward us. They might surprise you and still befriend us anyways. Brian and Carl didn't seem to push us away, and I bet the village won't, either, especially when they've already worked so hard to keep your werewolf secret hidden here in Circa."

Buck walked in silence for a moment while pondering the wise words that Phyllis had said. "You're right, Phyllis," he replied. "If they found out later that I lied to them, then that would have negative results, so I'll tell them the truth. But I'll wait until after the memorial service, and then tell everyone at once while they're gathered together, and hope for the best."

"Sounds good," she replied. "Now, I'll race you to your cabin!" Then she sped off quickly ahead of Buck, leaving a trail of snow dust behind, before being quickly followed closely in pursuit by Buck.

"Cheater!" shouted Buck with laughter as he quickly gained on Phyllis and caught up with her, before grabbing her from behind and scooping her up off her feet, and into his arms, whisking her speedily to his cabin for a night of fun and romance.

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CHAPTER 28

February 22, Tuesday, Two Days Later

Buck stood in front of the residents of Circa, a crowd of 300 people— men, women, and children—gathered together in the school's gymnasium, ready to conclude his emotional memorial service speech for Ron and Carl, which left many in the crowd mournful with tears, despite the fact that they had never met Carl. Buck was the last to speak, with his speech following the emotional talks from Phyllis, Brian, and a few others from the village who were also good friends with Ron and had known him their whole lives.

"As I had written on the notices that I left on your doors yesterday, I have something very important to share with you while you are all gathered together," spoke Buck to the crowd of Circa residents, family, and friends.

Phyllis stood up from her folding metal chair in the front, which she sat in, and walked to the front, facing the crowd, standing at Buck's side, holding and squeezing onto his left hand for support and comfort.

"I know you all want to know how Ron died, and what I am about to say to everyone may or may not shock some of you, but has to remain a secret and kept within Circa for as long as humanly possible," Buck told the crowd. "It has been very difficult for all of you to have kept my werewolf secret within Circa, and Phyllis and I can't be thankful and grateful enough to all of you for doing so, but what I am about to tell everyone is just as crucial. Ron died while trying to save Phyllis from a stranger with supernatural abilities similar to mine, a very evil man, who was also a dangerous vampire."

Gasp and sounds of restlessness could be heard from the crowd, who were not quite sure how to react or respond to Buck's fearful words.

"I know it's hard to believe, and I didn't want to myself at first, but vampires have existed, and are also the reason why I became a werewolf," said Buck to the stunned crowd as he continued on telling them about Dietrich, Titus, his minions, and how he became a werewolf, along with Titus's evil plans for Circa, but saving the vampire transformation news of Phyllis and himself for last.

"It sounds like we owe you a gratitude of thanks for saving us, Phyllis and Circa from "chaos" "spoke one of the council members from the audience nicknamed, Ray. At age forty, he was the youngest of the council members and the most controversial as well; for he had spent much more of his free time living in Fairville, then living in Circa.

"You're a hero in our eyes!" shouted a seventy-year old elderly woman from the back row, while excitedly holding her cane high above her head, as a demonstration of gratitude and support for them. Her name was Elizabeth, but everyone called her "grand-ma;" as she seemed to love children, and often baked hundreds of cookies a month, for the local village kids.

“I hope one of them didn’t get Shirley, too!” shouted Nadine, a middle-aged woman from the audience, who was a friend of Shirley’s, in a worried tone of voice. “I haven’t been able to find her, and she’s not returning my calls!”

“Don’t worry about Shirley,” spoke another elderly council member named Peter to her in response. “I’ll try finding her after Buck finishes with the service. I’m sure she has a good reason or explanation for not returning your calls and for not being here.”

“There’s one last thing that Phyllis and I would like to share with everyone before you leave, and we both hope that it won’t change how you feel about us,” said Buck to the crowd.

The crowd eagerly listened for what Buck was about to tell them, expecting to hear news that he and Phyllis were going to get married, or that maybe Phyllis and him were going to leave Circa. But they were not expecting the news they received and, instead, became frightened with the news that he told them.

“Phyllis and I are now both vampires,” said Buck nervously. “And we ask that you keep our newest secret also.”

Phyllis squeezed Buck’s hand even tighter from nervousness, as the crowd murmured among themselves, looking at one another and trying to decide how to handle this news.

“Phyllis was forcibly turned into a vampire by Dietrich, and I had Phyllis also turn me into a vampire, making me both a vampire and a werewolf, something that we felt we needed to do in order to defeat them and save Circa,” Buck explained. “We could not have defeated them any other way, and we ask that you please trust us not too hurt any of you, as we could never allow ourselves to do so!”

A council member named John, an older, grey-haired gentleman in his sixties, and a lifelong resident of Circa, stood up from his seat in the back row and spoke. “Buck and Phyllis, you know that we all love you, but this is different from your werewolf curse. We are forever grateful to you both, and always will be, but you were only a threat to Circa three or four nights a month as a werewolf and we could avoid you during those nights, but now you will always be a possible threat to us, both day and night, twenty-four hours a day, and now you say that Phyllis is a threat also. I’m sure you won’t intentionally want to hurt us, but you might be unable to control yourselves.”

“What about our children?” asked another frightened, young woman from the crowd in a loud voice. “What if you can’t fight your new urge for drinking blood and decide to drink some blood from our children when no one is watching, or from anyone of us for that matter?”

The crowd began to become more restless now, stirring up strife and discord from fear and murmurings. Just then, a snow machine’s engine could be heard outside when driving up to the gymnasium door. Two, ten year old boys from the village, who had been out playing during the service, abruptly ran inside while also trying to catch their breaths before they spoke. Much of the village crowd turned around to look when one of them finally shouted; “we were riding on the river, near the old gold dredge and stopped there to play when we saw Shirley inside! She is dead too!”

“She was really white like a ghost, frozen, and it looked like something bit her in the neck!” added the other boy. The crowd somberly hung their heads in despair upon hearing further tragic news, and the gymnasium momentarily went silent, before the deafening silence was soon broken by another loud voice.

“I don’t trust them!” a young teenage voice shouted.

“I’m scared!” shouted one of the small children who appeared to be frightened.

“They feed on animals, not humans!” shouted a familiar voice from the front of the crowd, as a man stood up in the front row. It was Brian, who turned and faced the crowd in anger. “My friend Carl and I were both with Buck and Phyllis before and after they became vampires, and please believe me when I tell you that they are the same people as always! They are both great people, whom love you, and they never once did anything to hurt my deceased friend Carl or me, nor would they ever hurt any of you, especially your children! I trust them both with my life, because they’ll only drink the blood of animals, and only as needed, not humans, and would never drink your blood unless you first gave them permission! I count it a privilege to call them my friends, and after the great sacrifice they made to save this village, it would be a great shame and disgrace if you all turned your backs on them now!” Then he sat back down in his chair again.

A tear could be seen slowly rolling down Phyllis’s left cheek as John stood up to speak to the crowd once more. “We’ll take a vote!” he said. “And if we vote for you to leave Circa, will you?”

“Yes, we will leave, if that is what the village asks,” replied Buck reluctantly.

“Do you also agree, Phyllis?” asked John.

Phyllis, being even more emotional and tearful now, could only reply with a head nod.

“Very well,” replied John. “All those who trust Buck and Phyllis, and want to allow them to remain here in Circa, raise your hands.”

Only twenty hands could be counted in the crowd of 300 people, mostly from a select few relatives and those villagers who chose to remain in Circa during Buck’s werewolf transformations instead of leaving, which most of the villagers had done.

“All those who would feel more comfortable if Phyllis and Buck were to leave, and request that they please leave Circa, raise your hands,” John said.

Buck and Phyllis were stunned with disbelief and felt the hurtful pain of betrayal, as 280 hands rose up everywhere throughout the crowd, a crowd of people whom they had known for most of their lives and had called family and friends.

“We can’t force you both to leave, and I promise to keep your new vampire secret for the rest of my days, as I’m sure the others in the village will also, but the crowd has voted for you to leave, and we ask that you leave Circa as soon as possible,” said John. “Personally, I was tired of leaving the village at every monthly full moon because of fear, and I would quickly grow tired of continuing to live in fear because of vampires also,” he added before turning and walking away with the crowd, which were quickly dispersing from the school’s gym, leaving Buck and Phyllis behind and standing somberly alone. John was almost out of the door when he stopped and turned toward Brian. “I will be in charge of cremating your deceased friend Carl’s body on Thursday, along with Ron’s body. Is

there any special request to be done with Carl's ashes that I should know about?"

"Please spread them on the Yukon River for me, if you could. I know Carl would want that," answered Brian, before John took one last glance at Buck and Phyllis and left the building.

Phyllis began to weep bitterly, so Buck hugged and held her, attempting to comfort and console her but also needing to comfort himself. Only Brian remained, and he wasn't sure if he should leave Buck and Phyllis alone for now or walk up to comfort them.

"We'll be alone now, without a home or friends, just as I had previously feared," said the distraught and sobbing Phyllis, with her head leaning on Buck's chest as he held her. "Even my uncle and our relatives walked out with the crowd, and are probably afraid of us!"

"We'll have each other," he responded. "I'll never leave you, ever."

"You'll have me also, both of you!" exclaimed Brian as he slowly walked up to them, hoping to reassure them of his friendship. "You two are always welcome in my home, anytime, and I will be available for both of you anytime you need help, or a friend, even if just for someone to talk to, I promise."

Buck extended his right hand out and shook Brian's hand, and Phyllis quickly gave Brian a hug of appreciation while she wiped her wet eyes dry.

"Where will you two go now?" asked Brian with concern. "You two are welcome to stay with me for a while, until you decide, or if not, maybe one of the other villages will accept you."

"We appreciate you, Brian, and your very kind offer, but this might be a good time for Buck and I to finally do some traveling together and go see the world," replied Phyllis as her mood began to change from sadness back to happiness again, after thinking about the possibilities. "That is, if I can get Buck to agree with my idea."

"Do you know what, girl?" asked Buck to her with a twinkle in his eyes. "I think that's an excellent idea, and I am going to take you away, just like Dietrich wanted, but to wherever you want to go!"

Phyllis laughed with joy as Buck hugged and kissed her. "Can we leave tonight?" she asked, now having a newfound hope.

"Yes, we can!" he answered as he scooped her off her feet and up into his arms. "Let's first swing by my cabin, grab a few things, some extra cash that I have stashed there, and then you can tell me where to go first. I will be your chauffer!"

"You two take care of yourselves, have fun, stay out of trouble, take it easy on the blood consumption, and promise me that you'll keep in touch, and call me if you ever need anything," said Brian.

"We promise, good friend," replied Buck as he nodded to Brian. "Take care of yourself."

Phyllis quickly smiled at Brian and whispered with a lip-synch a, "Thank you," to him before Buck bolted away with Phyllis, carrying her in his arms and vanishing out of the back door of the school gym, with the sound of Phyllis's laughter fading away in the far distance.

Brian felt some sort of satisfaction within himself, knowing that Phyllis was happy again and free to fulfill her heart's desire, along with Buck, for the

remainder of their days together on Earth, which could be an eternity for all he knew. He also felt a small amount of jealousy as the burden and weight of the working man's world begun to set in, with bills, responsibilities, taxes, and his career, which he was soon going to reenter, while Phyllis and Buck had the supernatural ability to live out their dreams by roaming the Earth with total freedom and with very few restrictions, doing whatever they pleased. *I can see myself enjoying that lifestyle for five years or so, before boredom sets in,"* he thought to himself as he walked out of the gym and toward Carl's truck. *I sure hope Buck and Phyllis don't eventually become bored with their new way of life, or become lonely and tired of being vampires, and lose their happiness and reason for living, as I probably would after a hundred years or so,"* he also thought to himself with concern. *I hope that when they finish seeing the world, they'll settle down somewhere nice together and be happy forever! And I hope that they won't forget me, and that I'll see them again someday,"* was his last thoughts of them before quickly turning new thoughts onto his wife Nancy and son Josh, and how blessed and happy he was for having such a wonderful family to live out the rest of his days with, and hopefully grow old together for many more years to come.

Brian climbed into Carl's truck, reached into his right pants pocket, and retrieved the keys, placing them into the ignition switch and starting the engine up. He sat still in the seat for a moment as he gave a quick glance at the village and thought about his last few days there. Sadness fell over him briefly as he thought about Carl and how life would change for himself now, without his good friend to hunt and fish with anymore, and how devastated Carl's wife sounded on the telephone after he informed her of Carl's death from the bed and breakfast cottage. He felt guilty for lying to both Jessica and Nancy about Carl's cause of death, but also knew that he had no choice in the matter. *At least Nancy will always be around for Jessica to help give her emotional support and comfort,* he thought before putting the truck's transmission into gear and driving back toward Fairville, with Circa slowly disappearing behind him. Suddenly, after a brief glance again in the mirror, he slammed hard onto the brakes, shoved the transmission into park, and leaped outside, while staring intently with disbelief, back toward the old wooden bridge. "Carl? Carl?" he shouted! "are you there?" Brian rubbed his eyes and shook his head in frustration before slowly climbing back into the truck. "I must either be going crazy or hallucinating!" he murmured. "I could have sworn that I saw Carl standing on the bridge and waving goodbye at me, but I guess it was all in my imagination. It's time to go home!" *Circa will quickly fade away in my rearview mirror, but my memories there will remain with me for the rest of my life,* thought Brian with one last glance as he continued driving away. *Rest in peace, Carl. Rest in peace, Grizz, my buddy.*

The End

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